Identity and the Politics of Scholarship in the Study of Religion

Edited by

José Ignacio Cabezón & Sheila Greeve Davaney

Routledge
New York • London

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Published in 2004 by
Routledge
270 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10016
www.routledge-ny.com

Published in Great Britain by
Routledge
2 Park Square
Milton Park, Abingdon
Oxon OX1 4RN U.K.
www.routledge.co.uk

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group.

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2004.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Identity and the politics of scholarship in the study of religion/edited by José Ignacio Cabezón, Sheila Greeve Davaney.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 0-415-97065-2 (hb: alk. paper) ISBN 0-415-97066-0 (pbk.: alk. paper)
1. Religion—Study and teaching. I. Cabezón, José Ignacio, 1956- II. Davaney, Sheila Greeve.
BL41.I34 2004
200'.71—dc22 2004014174

ISBN 0-203-32462-5 Master e-book ISBN

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INTRODUCTION

José Ignacio Cabezón and Sheila Greeve Davaney

I. BACKGROUND

What does a scholar's identity have to do with the objects of his or her critical inquiry? Does scholarly knowledge require that investigators have personal distance from or proximity to the materials that they scrutinize? Do the particularities of individual or communal history aid or hinder the production of knowledge? How is identity to be understood, and what groups or individuals are to be the arbiters of the role it plays in teaching and scholarship? On the basis of what criteria should scholarship be judged?

These questions all have come to have prominence in the contemporary Western academy. They are at the center of the debates concerning what constitutes acceptable academic knowledge and what the role of the scholar is in the creation of that knowledge. While these debates are intense and widespread in the current historical moment, their roots go back at least to the emergence of the modern period and to the Enlightenment's quest for certain knowledge that was unburdened by the conflicting claims of both idiosyncratic personal histories and the warring legacies of philosophical and religious traditions. Emergent out of decades of widespread conflict, the early modern period sought ways beyond the impasses of particular personal and communal identities to forms of universal agreement about the nature, methods, and results of scientific and humanistic inquiry. The way beyond competing and conflict-ridden perspectives was thought to be, for Enlightenment thinkers, a universal rationality that all humans in

principle shared and whose deployment would lead to the resolution of disputes, providing the framework for modern persons and emergent nation-states to live in peace and to flourish. The ideal of rationality was, according to philosopher Stephen Toulmin, accompanied by the "myth of the clean slate," a myth that saw rationality as the means "to sweep away the inherited clutter from traditions, clean the slate and start again from scratch."[1] To start again, without the distortions of inheritance, became not only the watchword for intellectual, especially scientific, pursuits, but also the model for modern political visions in this revolutionary age. Few modern developments display as much antipathy toward the past, tradition, and the conditioned character of individual and communal identities as did the French Revolution.

While much of the Enlightenment espoused the ideal of rational knowers unencumbered by history or subjective particularities, by the nineteenth century other intellectuals had begun to raise questions concerning the assumptions behind such views of rationality. Especially in Germany in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries leading thinkers asserted the historical character of rationality. These German intellectuals turned away from claims of universal experience and unsituated knowledge and instead focused on the individuality and particularity of the human self, insisting that such human distinctiveness is grounded in and reflective of differences in history and environment. In contrast to the ideals of universal knowledge and universal standards of judgment, German thinkers such as Johann Gottfried Herder asserted that there were no single standards of knowing or, importantly, of judging historical reality.

The turn to the human knower as historical did not deter nineteenth-century thinkers from asserting the validity of their claims. It was precisely because humans *were* historical and brought with them their experience, national identity, and various inheritances that they could penetrate and understand human cultural and historical reality. If a rationality uninfluenced by time and place or history continued to command allegiance in the physical sciences and mathematics, it increasingly seemed ill suited for the human sciences, where new, more appropriate methods were now sought. As the nineteenth century unfolded, the modern disciplines of the social and human sciences took shape, and with them there emerged a greater appreciation for the embedded character of human existence. Scholars of the nineteenth century hence embraced a Vico-like certitude that humans know best what they themselves have created and that human historicity and social embeddedness did not decrease the human capacity for true knowledge but in fact were the very means by which it was to be obtained.

While there are many basic assumptions that separate Enlightenment thinkers from nineteenth-century historicists, each period maintained in its own way the conviction that objective knowledge was possible and that the relation between the knower or scholar and his or her object of study was one of transparency. For the former, the neutrality and nonhistorical character of reason allowed for an unmediated relation between knower and known. For historicists, while the scholar's historicity did act as a kind of mediating force, it was not usually seen as epistemically problematic. If a dimension of the scholar's identity did become problematic, it could be bracketed, expunged, or ignored.[2] For much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the full complexities of the relation between individual identity and knowledge—both knowledge in general and scholarship in particular—remained unthematized within a general framework that we might call *epistemological optimism*. Identities were no impediment to knowing.

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially in Europe, intellectual developments occurred that would lay the groundwork for the unraveling of these assumptions of transparency and unproblematic historicity. Thinkers such as Marx, Weber, Nietzsche, Troeltsch, and Freud raised issues concerning the relation of location and claims to knowledge and concerning the role of power in the constitution of truth and the function of previously unconsidered factors—such as the unconscious, class, and nationality—in the perception of reality. Scholars concerned with the interpretation of texts from distant times and places began in earnest the hermeneutical discussion of the ways in which the conditioned character and self-understanding of the interpreter influenced the understanding of a text, a work of art, or a historical event or period. While the notion of objectivity modeled on science continued to shape the academy, thinkers from Heidegger (with his ontology of historicity) to the Frankfurt School (which focused on the political ramifications of perspectival claims to truth) to anthropologists such as Franz Boas (who struggled with the cultural conditionedness of anthropological claims about different cultures) all contributed to the steady shift in assumptions about knowledge and the role a scholar's identity plays in its acquisition.

The fissures in the monolith of Enlightenment rationality and objectivity created by figures as diverse as Marx and Boas opened up the possibility for the emergence of new voices. By the latter half of the twentieth century, those who had previously been the object of scholarship, and who had heretofore been denied their own scholarly voice, began to speak. These were often individuals and groups who had been the victims of scholarship that did not acknowledge its own location or

the racial and cultural biases that informed it. In the post–World War II era African Americans, women of all races, former subjects of colonial rule, and various other groups began to rethink the nature of knowledge and its relationship to identity and to social location. Where once identity and location were deemed unimportant—or else easily bracketed away—now they moved to the foreground; factors such as race, gender, class, economic interests, and the specifics of individual or communal experience were no longer seen as extraneous to the production of academic knowledge but were, for good or ill, the central categories that framed such knowledge. The "uninflected" knower of the Enlightenment and the benignly historicized knower of the nineteenth century were replaced by subjects constituted through and through by the unique potentialities and limitations of particular identities, and the axioms of neutrality and detachment were challenged with newer views of scholarship as politically charged and value driven.

II. THE TOPOGRAPHY OF IDENTITY

This continual erosion of the notion of the scholar as a detached and neutral observer has brought about a paradigm shift in the human sciences. The identity and subjectivity of the scholar and their relation to the knowledge and scholarship he or she produces are now firmly established as central theoretical concerns. Many contemporary scholars see variables such as race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, class, and sexual orientation, on the one hand, and ideological factors such as political or religious affiliation, on the other, as an important aspect of their self-understanding as scholars and as inextricably related to the questions they ask and the claims they make within and for the academy. Institutionally, much of the debate about the nature and status of knowledge and scholarship revolves around the issue of identity. In numerous academic disciplines from history to literary theory to the social sciences the question of the "subject" has become primary.

The turn to identity within academic disciplines has had a complex and often conflicted history. While nineteenth-century Germans posited national identity—the blood, soil, and civilization of distinctive peoples—as the central key to understanding identity, the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have witnessed a seemingly endless proliferation of factors that designate and determine identities. A central topos around which the discussion about identity has coalesced has been the distinction between elements that are supposedly given, or inborn, and those that are culturally constructed. For many thinkers there are distinctions between, say, biological sex and gender,

with the former being an innate characteristic of a person and the latter pointing to the social and cultural interpretations of masculinity and femininity. Or again, the color of one's skin may be given at birth, but how a society represents race so as to attach values to it is a cultural construction. However, there is great debate, as evidenced by critical race theory, about whether it is possible to make such clear-cut divisions or whether, indeed, the seemingly inborn characteristics of race and biological sex are not *from the beginning* imbued with culture.[3]

Moreover, complicating the situation even further, being "given" does not mean necessarily being fixed or unchangeable. Many "innate" aspects of a person's identity, such as sexual designation or skin color, are increasingly recognized as being malleable. Many of the aspects that have traditionally been considered part of sexual identity (primarily sexual characteristics) can now be altered. Or again, as in the case of Michael Jackson, even skin pigmentation is changeable. On the other hand, even factors that are easily recognized as culturally constructed, such as the social denigration of one race or gender in relation to others, are often experienced with all the weight of seeming inescapability, offering individuals little choice in how they experience them; that is to say, the recognition that certain facets of identity are culturally and socially constructed does not mean that they are easily disassociated from or disregarded.

Beyond these factors that impact identity, whether given or culturally received, there are also what might be termed elective or optional dimensions of identity, such as political affiliation, religious self-identification, or even national citizenship. These seemingly discretionary elements of a person's identity, while sometimes chosen (i.e., not given or assigned), may nonetheless be deeply determining of who one is, what values one holds, or what choices one makes. Precisely because they are the result of deliberate choice, they may result in their being more influential in shaping who one is than, say, elements that are assumed but less self-consciously operative in identity formation. However, even designating certain aspects of identity as elective is often problematic. In many parts of the world and in segments of all societies, while some persons have the freedom of choice about, say, religious identity, others, for example women, do not. And while those in economically and politically privileged positions might be able to choose where they live and even what passports, designating national identity, they carry, most of the people of the world do not have such a choice. Thus even aspects of identity labeled "chosen" are not straightforward or transparent.

As the recognition of the plurality of factors contributing to a person's identity has increased and the complexity in interpreting these factors has multiplied, so too have questions about how these various

components relate (1) to one another, and (2) to how one encounters and knows the world. Often one aspect of identity is prioritized above all others as the most significant. Thus one's maleness or blackness or gayness or Americanness is seen to be the all-determining element that organizes and subordinates all other factors. A certain form of ordering goes on as certain dimensions are considered, both positively and negatively, to be the most or least significant part of a person's identity. But who decides what aspects of identity trump what? Sometimes it is clearly the subject himself or herself who consciously makes such determinations. Some of the contributors to this volume indeed show how they at times manipulate their identity—concealing or revealing different aspects—for specific (e.g., pedagogical) aims. Rita Gross's essay is a good example of this.

But as several of the other essays in this volume make clear, it is often the case that the dominant aspect of a person's identity is simply determined by context, that is, by others. For example, Pamela Eisenbaum, a Jewish New Testament scholar who teaches in a Christian school of theology, shows how different aspects of her identity move into the foreground or recede depending upon who her interlocutors are. When she is in a classroom addressing future Christian ministers, her identity as a Jew is clearly in the forefront of students' minds. (Why would a *Jew* want to study the New Testament?) When she is addressing Jewish audiences, it is her academic specialty that moves into the position of principal identity marker. (Why would she study the *New Testament*?) And when she is in conversations with peers in her scholarly guild, both her Jewishness and her specialty (the New Testament) move into the background, and it is her identity as a scholar that surfaces as the dominant aspect. José Cabezón provides us with another example of the way in which the decisive aspect of one's identity—the trump—is determined by others and of how this varies in different contexts. Hence, for example, he mentions how at the time of his first permanent academic appointment (in a Christian theology school) what seemed to matter most to the press was the fact that he is a Buddhist, while at the time of his last appointment (in a public university) what mattered most to segments of the public was the fact that he is gay.

This malleability has led some theorists to insist that human identities, especially in today's world, are not singularly defined but instead are plural and malleable, without clear or consistently dominating features. In these views humans lack constitutive centers—some would say entirely, while others would claim that the factors that shape identities come to prominence in an episodic manner. A person's gender

may be the determining factor in one context but irrelevant in another. Or religious affiliation and experience may play a central role in moral self-understanding but be negligible in contexts within which ethical or moral concerns are not at issue.

The move to such fragmentary, transitory, or plural senses of identity is increasingly widespread today but these developments, like the more unified versions of human identity, raise numerous questions. Are the multiple elements in such identities constructed or given, chosen or imposed? What can qualify or disqualify a person from claiming a certain identity, such as membership in a specific religious community or ethnic group? What or who determines, for example, whether someone counts as a Native American or a Catholic? If there are multiple factors influencing identity, are some more fundamental than others? And who should decide this? Does any sort of epistemological privilege or epistemological disadvantage accompany certain identities? How does being identified or labeled by others affect one's identity? And, importantly, what does identity, either as unified or fragmented, have to do with scholarship?

III. RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AND BEYOND

In many academic disciplines, the current debates over the nature of claims to knowledge exhibit both the Enlightenment-inspired quest for objective and universally valid truth and the more contemporary recognition of the reality and impact of identity on such academic pursuit of knowledge. Indeed, within the debates about identity and scholarship, two extremes or ideal types can thus be identified as framing the discussion on the contemporary scene. At one end of the spectrum, influenced by scientific understandings of objective knowledge, there continues the view that the identity of the knower is irrelevant to the truth of the knowledge. In this model, true knowledge is independent of the knower. At the other end of the spectrum is the view that reduces knowledge to claims inextricably linked to particular identities and to the experiences that emerge from those identities. In this view, Enlightenment-grounded notions of knowledge and truth are rejected and replaced by views of context-specific claims to knowledge in which identity and experience play a dominant role. In between there are numerous attempts to rethink the nature of scholarship in a manner that recognizes the importance of identity without relinquishing scholarly commitment to public scrutiny and the demonstration of sound evidence that most of the academy continues to espouse as the sine qua non of acceptable scholarship.

This volume takes its place within these debates. Its contributors locate their reflections about the relation of scholarship and identity within the broad cross-disciplinary attempts to grapple with the epistemological and political problems that have emerged as scholars explore the link between subjective and communal identities, on the one hand, and the production and evaluation of scholarship, on the other. But this volume contributes an important set of additional interventions to these discussions, for the authors are all *scholars of religion*. Such a contribution to the debate from religious studies scholars is significant because historically there have been few disciplines where debate about the relation of identity and scholarship have raged more contentiously, most often focusing on the scholar's religious identity or lack thereof.

Yet, despite this intense concern about religious identity among those interested in the study of religion, there has been little comprehensive analysis of these issues in relation to the various subdisciplines represented in religious studies. Nor has there been sufficient attention paid to the wide range of epistemological and political issues that simultaneously resonate with and are distinctive from the discussions in other academic disciplines. Moreover, in other academic disciplines, where the debates about identity have been more fully developed, religious identity has rarely been systematically examined as an important dimension of identity; race or gender or ethnicity or sexual orientation have dominated the debates, with religious affiliation being virtually absent. This volume seeks to begin to fill these lacunae in the current debates and to move the discussion within religious studies into a more extensive and fruitful interchange with similar conversations currently taking place in other disciplines.

The field of religious studies provides a unique vantage point for exploring the issues concerning identity and scholarship for a number of reasons. Many religious traditions have long histories of systematic reflection about themselves, about other traditions, and about identity, and as the academic study of religion increasingly becomes an international pursuit those reflections will have greater impact on contemporary debates within the field. However, religious studies, as it has developed in the Western academy, was centrally related to Christianity both positively and critically, as modern thinkers distanced themselves from the control of religious authorities and the religious aims of the Christian churches. Until the modern period in the West, the analysis of religion was mostly an exercise internal to religious communities, most prominently Christianity, which was deeply connected with the religious and spiritual aims of religious traditions. For much of Christian history, reflection about Christianity was part of the practice

of piety, and when other religious traditions were considered, it was often for polemical religious purposes. In such circumstances the scholars who reflected on these matters were virtually all practitioners of Christianity, for whom identification with Christianity played a significant role.

As we saw above, with the advent of the modern period, profound changes occurred in terms of the Western academic enterprise in general. These developments would have profound ramifications for the interpretation and study of religions. The shifts in conceptualizing what would pass as knowledge in the modern period took place over several centuries and found definitive expression in the emergence of the modern university, often dated from the founding of the University of Berlin in the nineteenth century. These developments brought with them a conception of scholarship predicated on autonomy, public scrutiny, and independent research. In principle, if not always in practice, they laid the foundations for the analysis of religion in ways that were unconstricted by the influence and control of religious powers. As nonreligiously regulated forms of scholarship emerged, as more and more awareness of the world's religions became available in the West, and as the professorate itself identified more and more with a secular worldview, scholars increasingly focused on religion not chiefly for the purposes of enhancing piety and furthering the aims of religious communities but as a dimension of human existence that merited independent study and research. While there had certainly been renegade scholars who espoused such a view prior to the modern period, now the nonreligious scholar—or at least the scholar for whom personal religiosity was not the determining factor—came to prominence in the modern university. Distinctions began to be made between religious study for religious purposes and what would come to be known as the academic or the scientific study of religion.

In some ways these developments paralleled those modern Enlightenment-derived moves to downplay identity or, again, the nineteenth-century approaches that recognized the historical identity of the scholar but assumed that such self-recognition could allow the scholar to regulate his or her relation to the object of study rationally. But in relation to religion these issues were fraught with both political and theoretical complications unknown to other objects of inquiry. In particular, the issue of the religious identity of the scholar in relation to the study of religion—what has been termed the insider/outsider debate—became an ongoing arena of contestation.

In Europe and then in the United States, approaches to the study of religious traditions developed, especially within the social sciences,

that emphasized detachment and the neutralizing of the scholar's own identity. Often these approaches defined religious traditions as part of broader cultural processes that were available to scientific scrutiny and explanation. But other understandings of religion yielded different views concerning the relation of the scholarly inquirer and the religious subject matter that was the object of study. In the nineteenth century, as the modern physical and social sciences extended the scope of their explanatory grasp, new understandings of religion emerged that attempted to exempt religion from seemingly reductive scientific scrutiny. Following thinkers such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, religion began to be interpreted, at least on some fundamental level, as sui generis, something utterly unique and indecipherable in terms of the methods and categories of ordinary science. These ideas, which Wayne Proudfoot has called "protective strategies," removed religion from the purview of science and suggested different kinds of relations between scholars and their objects of study.[4]

At least two trajectories carry within them these assumptions about religion. The first has been broadly associated with theological interests in religion, wherein it has been assumed that religion is a unique phenomenon and that therefore only insiders could rightly understand and interpret it, at least in terms of what was thought to be its most profound core or essence. Understanding religion, in contrast to understanding literature or plant life, was something only a practitioner—only one who lived and experienced the religion—could carry out in an adequate manner. The second trajectory came to be associated with what is known as the history of religions school, most closely identified in the twentieth century with Mircea Eliade. This school of thought also asserted the sui generis understanding of religion and rejected as partial and incomplete the approaches emerging in the social sciences. But it suggested a distinctive relationship between scholars and religious objects of study. Within the Eliadian approach, neither the practitioner nor the detached scholar was in the best position to understand religion, or what Eliade came to term *the sacred*. Instead, it was only the inquirer who was simultaneously a scholar *and* a person empathetic to the sacred who could understand these dimensions of reality. Indeed, parts of Eliade's project, not always shared by others in this trajectory, suggest that only the one inducted or initiated into the mysteries of the sacred could possibly penetrate the depths of this completely unique realm of reality. Hence, in its extreme forms this approach has suggested that the study of religion requires a twofold identity, that of scholar and that of participant in the realm of the sacred.[5]

These different approaches characterized the various forms of religious studies throughout most of the twentieth century.[6] In the United States these orientations were often also connected with the institutional location of the scholar, with "insider" perspectives being located within divinity schools and denominational universities and colleges, and "outsider" approaches being found in social science departments. Even in relation to the latter, religion was rarely studied in public institutions because of the American tradition of the separation of Church and state. Hence, in terms of sheer numbers, for many decades such institutions as divinity schools dominated the advanced study of religion in America, while the undergraduate study of religions took place mostly in religiously affiliated colleges and universities. In 1963 this all changed when the Supreme Court decided in the case of *The School District of Abington v. Schempp* that religion could be taught as a legitimate field of study as long as the goal was not indoctrination or the furthering of religious aims. With this decision the academic study of religion in the United States began to shift away from assumptions of insider privilege and toward models of detachment and objectivity that neither assumed nor required religious identification on the part of the scholar. With these shifts came the creation of religious studies departments in public universities and the reinterpretation of what it meant to study religious traditions, beliefs, and practices across the academic spectrum, including in theological schools and religiously affiliated colleges and universities.

As the discipline of religious studies has made a bid to be accepted as a legitimate field of study in the academy, there has been a concomitant downplaying of the identity of the religious studies scholar. Sometimes there is even an overt hostility toward any religious affiliation that the scholar may have, since religious self-identification is seen as compromising objectivity (once again, a legacy of the Enlightenment ideal of the detached, neutral scholar). Moreover, the very assumptions about the sui generis conception of religion—that religion can only be understood in its own terms—have been widely challenged across the academic spectrum, resulting in the rehabilitation of religious traditions, beliefs, and practices as cultural forms open to nonreligious forms of examination and critical analysis. While views claiming that religion can only be understood by religious insiders continue to be significant, they have increasingly been challenged on the present scene and have become far more vulnerable to criticism from the broader academy. In some regards the "detached" observer seems to have gained ascendancy within the study of religions.

This development in religious studies has taken place, however, just as the models of detachment and nonidentity are increasingly challenged in

other disciplines. What is of enormous significance here is that while scholars of religion attempt to claim their place in the academy by embracing models of objectivity and detachment, these very models are under widespread attack in many other areas of the academy, and the role of identity in scholarship has now once more moved to the foreground as scholars across multiple disciplines seek a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between identity and the academic enterprise, an understanding that neither denies the role of identity nor reduces scholarship to forms of subjective experience. Moreover, while the issue of the religious affiliation of the scholar has historically played the most crucial role in the debates around identity and the study of religion, now a multitude of factors are being examined as relevant to the debate. Today it is no longer solely or most significantly a question of one's religious experience, history, or affiliation that is the key issue, but rather a scholar's gender, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, and the idiosyncratic elements of his or her personal history. Heretofore there have been few if any concerted efforts by scholars of religion to take their place in these more recent debates beyond the issue of the status of religious insiders and outsiders in religious studies. This volume seeks to remedy this situation, turning to the issue of identity and scholarship, including religious identity, but broadening the discussion beyond the question of religious association to deal with the multitude of factors that constitute scholars' identities. By so doing, these essays hope both to contribute to the wider debates about subjectivity and scholarship and to further the conversation within religious studies concerning its own disciplinary self-understanding.

IV. IDENTITY AND THE PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE

How does identity impact the production of knowledge, in this case knowledge about religion? Every essay in this volume grapples with this issue in some way. Clearly, our identity impacts what we know and how that knowledge is disseminated. But what are the *nature* and *extent* of the influence? *How* and *how much* does who we are impact what we know? As noted above, one can identify two ideal-typical positions, two poles that mark the boundaries of the current debates. The first, which has its roots in scientific and positivistic models of knowledge, would claim that identity has no impact upon knowledge. For example, two scholars of different genders, each investigating the same religious phenomenon, should reach the same conclusions—at least if they ask the same questions. At the other end of the spectrum is the view that all knowledge can be reduced to the identity of the one

who produces it, suggesting that identity overdetermines scholarship. In this view identity both positively bestows epistemological—and often political/strategic—privilege and simultaneously negatively circumscribes what a scholar can know and legitimately claim. For example, a woman is assumed, in this view, to have special access to matters concerning women in a manner that no male would ever have available to him.

The authors in this volume eschew both of these alternatives. All of the contributors assert that, indeed, who you are affects the agenda you set for yourself as a scholar, the approaches you find compelling, and the conclusions you reach. At the same time, all the contributors resist the assertion that identity predetermines our intellectual trajectories or that it is on the basis of identity that the validity of our scholarship is decided. In relation to the first boundary position, all the contributors reject the view that scholarship is a neutral or value-free enterprise. Identity *does* matter; scholars are *not* clean slates with no histories, values, or experiences shaping their scholarly work.

Several essays in this volume offer us nuanced accounts of *how* various aspects of the author's identity have mattered to their scholarly work. Francis X. Clooney, a Christian who studies Hinduism, details how the various components of a person's religious heritage and training shape scholarly choices and interests. He demonstrates how the religious identity of the theologian who is committed to the comparative enterprise of crossing religious boundaries in his scholarship serves both as the ground of such crossings and sometimes as an impediment to it. Contrariwise, Francisca Cho details how a good deal of influential scholarship in the field of Buddhist studies is grounded on scholars' propensity to distance themselves from their object of study. Cho terms this the "scholarship of apostasy," a form of scholarship in which a scholarly identity is fashioned in a negative and reactionary way: through the repudiation of what they conceive to be insiders' perspectives.

The essays in this volume also explore and criticize the other extreme—the solipsistic extreme that reduces all knowledge to the identity of the knower—the view that scholarship and teaching are overdetermined by identity. In particular, several authors focus on the claim that certain aspects of one's identity afford one epistemological privilege (or its contrapositive, that a lack of certain forms of identity puts one at an epistemological *dis*advantage vis-à-vis one's subject matter). José Cabezón takes issue with this view on philosophical grounds, arguing that the position is neither logically consistent nor pragmatically tenable. Francisca Cho shows how the coincidence of her identity and scholarship

on one level (she is an ethnic Korean woman working on East Asian Buddhism), far from giving her privilege, actually works against her in "the field," where Western scholars, especially male scholars, have more stature in the communities she studies.

Other authors point to subtle and unacknowledged versions of this extreme view by noting how they are routinely assumed (especially by students) to "be" what they study and teach. Both Francisca Cho and Rita Gross discuss how they are routinely taken to subscribe to the religions they teach. While this may occasionally be the case in other disciplines, its prevalence seems widespread in relation to the study of religions, raising questions about why identification or lack thereof is such a potent issue in relation to religion but not, for example, in relation to British literature or to the study of economic systems. Both Cho and Gross suggest that this peculiar response to religion need not be solely problematic but might offer unique pedagogical possibilities through the deployment of strategies of concealment and/or revelation of religious identity as a means of uncovering the assumptions students bring to the study of religion.

Pamela Eisenbaum's essay offers another twist on the issue of how one's identity does or does not determine the content of one's scholarship. She is one of only a handful of female scholars of the New Testament and Christian origins who is also Jewish. Her particular scholarly focus is on the Apostle Paul. To get at her own contention that identity—at least religious or ethnic identity—does not determine scholarly content, Eisenbaum reviews the work of Jewish scholars on Paul and demonstrates that no consensus—no "Jewish" take on Paul—is identifiable, but only a wide range of diverse positions that mirror the same varied positions found in non-Jewish scholarship.

If it is *not* one's identity that principally drives one's scholarly agenda, what does? If it is not one's identity that privileges one's scholarship, what does? Several of the contributors offer answers to these questions. Eisenbaum, for example, shows how the prevailing intellectual ethos of a given scholarly field in a particular historical period affects scholarship more than, say, the scholar's ethnic/religious identity. Identity is important here, but it is identity *as a scholar* in a field with particular trends, methods, scholarly criteria, and academic terms of assessment that is most influential. Francis Clooney points to how the early theological training he received (more than, say, his specific religious identity as a Catholic) has influenced his intellectual trajectory. As for scholarly privileging, most of the contributors to this volume agree that what gives scholarship credence is the fact that it stands up to public scrutiny and that it is defensible according to the

canons of academic acceptability. Scholarship is accepted or rejected in the public square that is the profession and not on the basis of some appeal to private experience or the vagaries of individual or group identity. Sheila Greeve Davaney and Pamela Eisenbaum, for example, concur with Bruce Lincoln's assertion that a scholar's credibility is found in his or her footnotes, that is, in the public demonstration of grounds for particular claims that the scholar makes.

While arguing fully for the public character of scholarly assessment, a number of contributors also raise the point that such academic standards are not neutral or value-free. As Cho notes, the standards that are the basis for judging good scholarship today are quite different from those of the past. Davaney also asserts this, arguing that standards of good scholarship are themselves socially constructed and therefore contestable and revisable. As such they do not embody some transhistorical or timeless norms but are reflective of the judgments and values of their time and place. It becomes no less imperative to examine what values, commitments, and forms of power shape such academic criteria than to interrogate the role of identity in shaping scholarly agendas and claims.

Finally, several of the authors turn the question of influence on its head in various ways. Rather than querying the nature and extent to which identity influences scholarship, they suggest that we might ask instead how scholarship alters identity. Clooney, Cho, and Jeffrey Kripal, albeit in different ways, stress how *what* they study (the religious traditions they study but also the specific views of those traditions) has impacted *how* they study and how their scholarly trajectories have given them liminal identities: identities that while difficult to inhabit at times, also serve as the ground for new ways of perceiving their object of study, the field, and indeed the world. Cabezón, taking a different tack, notes that scholarship does not exist in a disembodied ether but is embedded in the institutional forms that together constitute the academy. How do social and institutional forces, including economic forces, affect scholarship? How do they affect scholars, fashioning for us new and perhaps *unwanted* identities? Kwasi Wiredu is arguably more optimistic than Cabezón in thinking that scholarship, explicitly comparative scholarship, can transform and indeed dissolve the provincial identities that keep us apart or set humans against one another.

V. THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY

The essays in this volume all recognize that scholarship is not a disembodied or disengaged enterprise. In particular, they all assert that

scholarship takes place in ever broadening realms of power and politics and that it plays political roles as well. What happens in the broader world obviously impacts what takes place in the academy. For example, there has been a tremendous increase in funding for Middle Eastern studies and for security studies since September 11, while there has been a call for restricting government funding for anything identified as "postcolonial studies," which many in the political establishment view as anti-American. The converse is also true. Even if scholars overestimate (because of our myopia and occasional hubris) the extent to which our work matters to those outside the academy, it clearly often *does* reverberate beyond the walls of academia.[7] One can think of the tremendous repercussions of biblical criticism for religious believers in the West. More recently, the fact that religious studies scholar James Laine received assistance from an Indian colleague at the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute (BORI) in Pune, India, when he was writing his book *Shivaji: Hindu King in Islamic India* appears to have been sufficient cause for the ransacking of BORI, one of India's most venerable academic institutions.[8] But even when many scholarly concerns appear removed from the wider world, they do not thereby cease to be political. The academy is even internally an intensely political place, a site where different forms of power circulate and in which power is constantly resisted. Many of the essays in this volume explicitly examine the issue of the intersection between power, scholarship, and identity.

There is, of course, no clear line of demarcation between the internal politics of the academy and the political influences that operate from and to the "outside world." But we also know that there is a politics internal and quite particular to the academy. The particular struggles that arise within academic circles—in educational institutions and in their departments, in professional organizations, in funding agencies, and so on—are all very specific. Internally, our struggles tend to be related to faculty and administrative appointments and to tenure and promotion decisions. They are played out in judgments about who gets hired, who gets funded, and who gets published (and where). Such battles are endemic to every field in the academy, and no area of scholarship is immune to their ongoing presence. However, there are factors that give religious and theological studies a political character quite distinctly their own.

The most important of these factors is obviously that the subject matter of critical inquiry is religion. Religion has a way of eliciting political response and influence from outside the academy in a way that few other objects of scholarly study do. And despite the rhetoric

to the contrary—a rhetoric that claims that academic institutions can maintain a pristine academic integrity in the face of external political pressures—we know that the forces brought to bear on institutions (both positive and negative) over religious issues can have a major impact on the way that religion is taught and studied. Religion remains, whether in its self-conscious avowal or in its looming absence, a constitutive element of (1) the identity of scholars, and (2) the reaction of those who respond to their scholarship. And in both the wider world and the confines of the academy the subject matter of religion continues to instigate controversies, making this field one of the most contentious of academic disciplines.

As we have been noting, a scholar's self-affirmation of a religious identity or the absence thereof has had an ongoing role to play in the academy. Some religiously affiliated institutions, for example, unabashedly require that members of their faculty not only have certain academic credentials but also profess certain religious beliefs and uphold certain religiously derived codes of conduct. In these cases, membership, even in fields unrelated to the study of religion, is dependent upon avowed religious and "moral" identity. Scholars in other, non–religiously affiliated institutions often look down upon their "confessional" colleagues, doubting their scholarly commitments. However, even in ostensibly secular institutions there are sometimes operative certain identity requirements for membership that are not always acknowledged. Consider, for example, the role that ideology and ethnic politics play in the field of Jewish studies, where it is almost unheard of for a pro-Palestinian scholar or one who is not Jewish to be appointed to a faculty position in this field. Marc Ellis, a Jewish scholar who is sympathetic to the plight of Palestinians, analyzes this reality in his essay.

Jewish studies is not unique, however, in this regard. Similar types of often unspoken laws exist in African-American religious studies and in the field of women and religion. And, in a new twist on identity politics, there are efforts in some state legislatures to pass laws, supposedly in response to the liberal leanings of the academy, mandating a certain percentage of faculty positions be held by persons espousing particular political party affiliations, in this case Republican. While identity does not ensure employment in these cases, a lack of specific identity is often sufficient to disqualify one from certain positions.

In some instances such requirements of identity can be seen as forms of redress for centuries of discrimination. In others, they are forms of internal disciplining on the part of groups through which dissenting voices are kept in line. Moreover, while certain imbalances

and injustices have begun to be addressed through such moves, especially in relation to racial and gender identities, there have been fewer efforts and less interest in correcting injustices against people with other forms of identity, and certain groups continue to experience discrimination on the basis of who they are. For example, despite public disavowals of prejudice and open recruitment of underrepresented racial and gender groups, openly gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons still find it difficult to obtain employment, especially if their field of research coincides with their identities (that is, if they are engaged in LGBT studies). Here, despite often made claims to the contrary, identity still counts, and does so in a negative fashion.

Decisions regarding hiring and tenure may appear to be strictly internal to the academy, governed by the norms of the profession, and supposedly having little to do with the identity of the scholar. The myth—perpetuated in large part by the objectivist rhetoric of the academy that still prevails in the academy's public face despite the widespread theoretical acknowledgment of the value-laden character of intellectual work—claims that extra-academic forces (e.g., the views of extra-academic religious institutions or of funding sources) play no role in such decisions. But academics know that this is far from being the case. In this volume, the myth is most clearly challenged in the essays of Tazim Kassam and Marc Ellis. Especially when the subject matter is religion, when scholars' work goes against the views of a powerful tradition or makes public certain facets of the tradition that are usually concealed, and perhaps especially when scholars self-identify with the religions they study, external forces can play a decisive role in everything from hiring and tenuring to funding. Both Tazim Kassam and Jeffrey Kripal, for example, offer nuanced accounts of their struggles with, respectively, Muslim and Hindu critics who have attempted to prevent their books from being published and/or distributed.

Such controversies usually begin as disputes over the *content* of the scholarship. Individuals or communities with a traditional (and often conservative) religious stance find something objectionable or offensive in the work of the scholar. In the case of Marc Ellis, it is his belief that Jews should, out of their Jewishness, take a stance in favor of Palestinian rights. In the case of Kassam, it was the fact that she focused on a syncretistic type of Muslim poetry. And in relation to Kripal, it was a psychosexual reading of the life and works of a Hindu saint. While beginning with divergences of opinion over contents and academic claims, however, these controversies often devolve into identity politics. In situations where scholars share the same identity—be

it religious, ethnic, or cultural—as the critics and scholars find their allegiance to the tradition or group called into question: "You are not a real Jew," or "You are not a good Muslim." Moreover, these disagreements not only have repercussions on participation in the group or recognition of one's identity but also rebound in relation to scholars' careers and at times, as Kassam notes, even cause them to fear for their safety.

In cases where the scholar's relationship to the tradition is *not* one of an insider, other strategies are often used by critics to delegitimize what are deemed problematic claims. Sometimes the recourse is to academic criteria—challenging the scholar's command of the languages or his or her access to the historical sources of a tradition. In other cases, as in the recent controversy concerning the reprinting in India of Paul Courtright's 1985 book, *Ganeśa: Lord of Obstacles, Lord of Beginnings*, which is in part a psychoanalytical reading of the story of this Hindu God, more exaggerated claims have been put forward. One of Courtright's critics has put it this way:

> The first responsibility of a scholar in describing, writing, speaking, teaching other cultures is to present those cultures or elements of those cultures in the same manner those cultures are viewed by themselves and by the people of those cultures. . . . A scholar who does not know how to present other cultures by their own criteria should not be allowed to teach those cultures. . . . Freedom stops here.[9]

While this particular critic does not go so far as to say that only Hindus can do responsible scholarship on the Hindu tradition, by making insiders to the tradition the ultimate arbiters of what is good scholarship the slide on the slippery slope to "identity solipsism" is well under way. A member of the Atlanta Hindu community, though arguably less subtle, is perhaps more honest when he claims bluntly that Courtright's work is "inaccurate because he does not practice Hinduism."[10] While we rarely hear that American scholars cannot teach European history or Asian literature, when religion is the topic, identity—and often forms of identity imbued with a normative character by certain persons or groups—move to the fore of the discussion. The Courtright controversy is paradigmatic of the way in which a debate seemingly over the content of scholarship devolves into a political struggle over identities and representation. What begins as a debate about the meaning of Ganeśa's flaccid trunk ends up as a polemic over who can speak about Hinduism.

The contributors to this volume argue that scholarship is always embodied and hence inflected with identity, power, and commitments.

There are no detached observers, no utterly "clean slates." This means that scholars always bring their identities to the table and that such identities should in no way rule them out as scholars. But if we all have identities, the consensus in this volume is that no particular religious, racial, gender, or other identity in and of itself should function as the trump card when evaluating the quality of scholarly work. Nor should any *lack* of particular identity rule out scholarly participation in a field of inquiry. If being a believer does not make one a good scholar, neither is the absence of belief the necessary precondition of scholarly integrity. In this sense the scholars represented here place themselves within the ever-shifting canons of the academy, claiming those public criteria while also recognizing their historical character and hence revisability. Here identity matters, but it is only one of the factors that must be taken into account.

Having rejected the assertions that individual or group identity is the final arbiter of scholarship, it is, finally, important to note that these essays exhibit a profound sense of the significance of what might be termed the ethical dimensions of scholarship. All denounce the kind of censorship that Kassam, Ellis, and Kripal have experienced. But the authors in this volume also know that scholarship impacts communities and traditions in sometimes quite negative ways. In this volume in particular there is a strong recognition that many of the groups and traditions studied have been victims of colonial domination or racial (or other forms) of discrimination and oppression and that they have suffered greatly by the distortion of their histories and cultures by those who have had the power to impose their views upon them and upon others. Contemporary scholars also participate in the production of a knowledge that affects a wider world. While all the contributors reject the curtailing of academic freedom and all distance themselves from a view of scholarship in which certain forms of identity determine who can research and teach what and to whom, they also argue for situating scholarship within the wider dynamics of political and social reality, locating the scholarly task in such a way that makes scholars responsible not only to the canons of the academy but also to the subjects of their scholarly inquiry. In this sense all the authors share the hope, if not the optimism, of Kwasi Wiredu that scholarship can contribute to widening our horizons and overcoming the parochialisms of our narrow identities, helping us to forge new historical identities more fully informed by the world.

We offer one final note by way of conclusion. The essays in this volume span a broad range of locations and perspectives within the study of

religion. The contributors hail from a variety of institutions that include public universities, liberal arts colleges, and graduate theological schools. The contributors are also located in a variety of subdisciplines within religious studies: Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Islamic, and biblical studies as well as comparative philosophy and the study of modern Western thought. They specialize in greatly differing geographical and historical periods that range from ancient India and China to modern Europe and Africa. The contributors represent, moreover, varied racial, ethnic, national, gender, and sexual identities. Importantly, their religious affiliations or lack thereof are also varied, and the relations of those identities to their scholarly fields of expertise are complex and never straightforward. Furthermore, a number of these scholars study and teach religious traditions with which they do not identify, while others are scholars of traditions they were born into or have associated with as adults. This diversity gives the volume a breadth of perspective that we thought was important in such an endeavor. While we believe that the issues discussed in this volume are representative of the issues in the discipline as a whole, we are not so naïve as to think that this volume is in any way exhaustive. We offer it, therefore, in the hope that rather than being the last word on the subject, it will instead be the first word, inaugurating a series of conversations that we feel are beneficial, indeed essential, to the discipline, especially at this juncture in its history.

Acknowledgments

This volume has its genesis in particular events that we (the editors) experienced during our years as colleagues at the Iliff School of Theology. (Cabezón taught at Iliff from 1989 to 2001, when he joined the faculty at University of California, Santa Barbara; Davaney joined the Iliff faculty in 1980 and still teaches there.) The particular experiences that most directly led to the compilation of this volume are not atypical of those of many faculty in different academic settings. They include the experience of failed and successful searches, tenures granted and denied, scholarship valued and devalued. They include battles over what should be taught and who should teach it. And they include experiences of the repercussions of various institutional decisions related to these matters on individuals and communities. Our conversations—with each other and with colleagues at other universities—convinced us, first, that the events as they unfurled at Iliff were not unique; and second, that questions related to identity and the politics of scholarship and teaching had received insufficient attention in the religious studies academy. With the support of then-Dean Delwin Brown, we

were able to convene a conference at Iliff in June 2004. Many of the contributors to this volume (Sheila Davaney, José Cabezón, Francisca Cho, Pamela Eisenbaum, Marc Ellis, Rita Gross, and Kwasi Wiredu) presented early versions of their essays at that conference. Wishing to get a broader representation of both scholars and issues, we then invited other colleagues to contribute essays (Francis Clooney, Jeffrey Kripal, and Tazim Kassam). The editors are grateful to the support provided this project by the Iliff School of Theology and by the University of California, Santa Barbara, and we are grateful to all of the contributors for their willingness to join us in this intellectual journey. Finally, we would also like to thank Maggi Mahan for the many hours she spent on manuscript preparation, and Michael Cox for his work on the index.

NOTES

1. Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (New York: Free Press, 1990), 175.
2. See Davaney's essay for references to nineteenth-century historicist orientations that sought to historicize their subject matter while simultaneously "extinguishing" the scholar's self.
3. Critical race theory is a growing area of cross-disciplinary reflection on the history and construction of racial categories. Often such theories juxtapose themselves both to biological theories of racial formation and to those positions that discount the importance of race. See, for example, Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994); and Howard Winant, *Racial Conditions: Politics, Theory, Comparisons* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).
4. Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 3ff.
5. See Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion: Gershom Scholem, Mircea Eliade, and Henry Corbin at Eranos* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), for a study of Eliade that stresses the "Gnostic" strands in Eliade's approach and his interest and participation in esoteric groups while eschewing the status of "official believer."
6. For a good overview of the insider-outsider debates in religious studies, see Russell T. McCutcheon, ed., *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader* (New York: Cassell, 1999).
7. Tsering Shakya, "Who Are the Prisoners?" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69:1 (2001): 183–189.
8. The event is described in an article in the *Times of India* (January 6, 2004), available from http: //timesofindia.com/articleshow/407226.cms. Two months prior to the incident, controversy concerning Laine's book in India caused Oxford University Press to withdraw it.
9. See, for example, the objections made by critics of James Laine's book *Shivaji*, mentioned earlier in this introduction, in an article by Panorama Karaka in the Indian magazine *Frontline*, "Politics of Vandalism" (January 17–20, 2004), available from http: //www.flonnet.com/fl2102/stories/20040130003802800.htm.

10. Subash Razdan, as paraphrased by Deepak Patel, "Controversy Surrounds Prof's Book on Hindu God," *Emory Wheel* (November 7, 2003). One of the best retorts to Razdan's position is found in an anonymous Web article available from http: //atheism.about.com/b/a/042027.htm:

> "To think that someone would argue that a person's interpretation of a story in a religion is wrong *because* they don't practice that religion is absurd in the extreme. And of course, a person cannot convert to Hinduism, which, in Razdan's universe, means that no one outside of Hinduism could ever produce an accurate interpretation of anything within Hinduism. That's a nice little closed system—it certainly prevents any outsiders from offering alternatives and critiques, doesn't it? But that's just a coincidence I am sure."

1

BETWEEN IDENTITY AND FOOTNOTES

Sheila Greeve Davaney

INTRODUCTION

Questions concerning the relation between identity and scholarship in the Western academy embody both deep historical legacies and very contemporary issues.[1] They are the result of several centuries of intellectual and political struggles over the nature of knowledge and truth. They express as well present-day debates concerning subjectivity, representation, and the nature of academic disciplines and, indeed, of the university itself. Moreover, these debates are occurring not only in some self-enclosed academic arena but within the context of a global situation in which numerous groups are seeking to assert their rights of self-definition and the control of their own histories, cultures, and experience; for many engaged in these struggles the academic production and control of knowledge are viewed as part of the political and social mechanisms that have functioned to oppress them. In this essay I will first rehearse something of the historical background to these questions in the West and then analyze what I take to be significant underlying assumptions framing the various options today. Finally, I want to explore how these perspectives intersect and are complicated within my own discipline of modern, especially Western, academic theology.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In many ways the modern West was born out of the cultural crises and massive shifts that characterized Europe in the wake of the demise of the

medieval world and the eclipse of the Renaissance. In the face of the shattering of Church authority and religious consensus, the subsequent religious wars that engulfed Europe, the emergence of modern nation-states, changes in economic systems and social organization, wider interaction with the world, and an altered scientific understanding of reality, early-modern thinkers, including not only intellectuals but diplomats and government officials, sought ways to adjudicate political and religious differences and restore cultural stability. A central response to these significant changes in European society was the Enlightenment, with its move, as Stephen Toulmin puts it, from the particular to the universal, the local to the general, the timely to the timeless, and the humanism of the Renaissance to the rationality of the Enlightenment.[2]

In particular there came to be articulated what was termed the ideal of reason. Reason, for Enlightenment thinkers, became the defining characteristic of human nature, assumed to be essentially the same in all humans and understood to be the source of knowledge and truth. Reason was thought to provide universally and publicly accessible criteria for assessing claims and thus could lead to impartial and objective knowledge to which all rational persons could assent. For many Enlightenment thinkers, this ideal of reason was the antithesis of authority, tradition, historical particularity, and often religious heritages and communities. Reason was to be above all "independent of context," purified of history and divorced from the "details of particular historical and cultural situations" (Toulmin, 21, 104). While modern persons might also have particular affiliations and be participants in communities, these were to be governed by the strictures of an autonomous and universal reason, not by localized values and prejudices. The goal, especially for the Western Enlightenment (i.e., the Franco-British Enlightenment) was not only objective and scientific knowledge but also a cosmopolitan universalism in which the loyalties to particular religious and cultural heritages were replaced with a properly enlightened (Europeanized) citizenship of the world.

These ideals and values shaped much of European society from the seventeenth century onward and by extension American society, including the modern university. They remain, for many, close to the heart of the academic enterprise today. But while central to much of what has occurred during the last several centuries, they were also challenged almost immediately from within European thought itself. Even within the Western Enlightenment, philosophers and other thinkers sought to delineate the limits of reason. And within the German Enlightenment there was evidenced a much greater appreciation for tradition, history, and religion and, indeed, a strong suspicion of the Western Enlightenment's, especially French, cosmopolitanism. Already in the eighteenth

century Immanuel Kant was arguing for the limits of reasons, and protohistoricists such as Johann Georg Hamann and Johann Gottfried Herder began to articulate a historicized understanding of reason that foregrounded the particularities of language and culture rather than a detached rationality unaffected by place and time.[3] As Georg Iggers puts it, for Herder "Truth, value and beauty are not one, but many."[4] According to Herder, there is no single norm or ideal for "judging, condemning, or praising." Instead the "good is scattered throughout the earth" not in one mode but in "a thousand forms" (Herder, 44).

By the nineteenth century, the challenges to the Enlightenment's version of reason and truth had become profound and widespread, especially within the German context. The excesses of the French Revolution and the adventurism of the subsequent Napoleonic Wars (all in the name of Enlightenment universalistic values) were repudiated by German thinkers and political leaders in the name of a particularistic national identity that celebrated not a universal citizenship but one rooted in Germanic lands, language, history, and religion. Within both Germany and Western Europe more generally, historical consciousness came to pervade many of the emerging humanistic disciplines and the newly developing social sciences, from the study of classical biblical texts to the study of non-European cultures in the colonial context. Questions were raised concerning the relation of the past and present and the relation that pertained between the knower and objects of study that were removed temporally, spatially, or culturally from the scholar, be they texts, other cultures, or historical times and places. Already there were debates about who could know, the status of claims to knowledge, and the role context and tradition played in the formation of ideas and in their significance and validity.

Still, the ideals of "objective knowledge" were not forsworn by much of the nineteenth century. In Germany, for example, perhaps the most significant embodiment of historicist insights was found in what was termed the Historical School. These historians, among them Wilhelm von Humboldt, Leopold von Ranke, and Friedrich Meinecke, were the founders of the modern academic discipline of history and the quintessential articulators of the historical method.[5] They eschewed all interest in generalities and commonalities and stressed the importance of the particular and the local. Still, they also insisted that the knowledge obtained by such focus upon the "facts" was objective and that, indeed, such historical methods were the only means for obtaining objective knowledge of historical reality. And even while the scholar was viewed as also historical for a long time, that historicity was not interpreted as an impediment to objective knowledge, for, as Ranke urged,

it was possible and desirable for the scholar to "extinguish" himself in the face of historical reality.[6]

If Ranke could still, at mid-century, imagine an eclipsed self, other thinkers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries began to unravel the dreams of benign detachment in the face of historicity. There were many developments that eventually eroded or stood in tension with both Enlightenment convictions and with the expectations of the early historicists. Two stand out in hindsight as particular intellectual challenges to the ideal of objectivity and unencumbered and detached knowledge. One was the emergence of what we have now come to term the masters of suspicion—Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche. Each in his own way deeply complexified the relation between ideas and the reality they sought to express. Nietzsche, in particular, countered the assumptions undergirding claims of objectivity and neutrality by asserting the perspectival character of all knowledge and stressing the intimate relation between power and knowledge. And while denouncing certain forms of historical memory as the nostalgia of the weak, Nietzsche himself was a major purveyor of stories of blood and soil that mythically set early Germanic people against and in superior relation to other groups.[7] With these thinkers, notions of transperspectival criteria of assessment, transparent relations between ideas and world, and presumptions of detached and neutral observers were replaced for many with visions of competing perspectives, unconscious drives, and socioeconomic processes that influenced all levels of culture. Knowledge and truth, far from transcending historical reality, were now thoroughly embedded in sociocultural, psychological, economic, and political processes and struggles.

Ernst Troeltsch is another figure whose work would eventually greatly contribute to the undermining of assertions of universalism and ahistorical objectivity. He strongly rejected monistic theories of truth and knowledge and notions of some universal unity in history and he resisted ideas of a common or general humanity. In their stead, Troeltsch emphasized particularity and individuality, especially cultural distinctiveness. Multiple perspectives and a plurality of histories replaced assertions of unity and commonality. And criteria for assessing historical developments become context-specific and context-bound. In the Troeltschian view of things, at least at the end of his life, there were no absolute standpoints, no transcultural or transhistorical vantage points from which some universal truth could be ascertained and agreed upon by all rational beings. What was left were a plurality of distinctive cultures, religions, and viewpoints, each with its own claim to validity for itself but none able to make claims upon others.

With Troeltsch, perhaps more than any other Western thinker, the relativity of claims to knowledge had entered the Western scene.[8]

In the United States many scholars in the humanities and social sciences would, in the twentieth century, be keenly interested in the sociohistorical nature of the objects of their inquiry. Still, as Peter Novick notes in relation to the discipline of history, many still pursued the dream of objective, scientific, and empirically derived knowledge unobscured by theory or by the locale and perspective of the scholarly inquirer. The emphasis in the United States became, to an even greater extent than in Europe, proven facts and information, no longer story or subjective opinion.[9]

CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

As philosopher Richard Bernstein has noted, both the legacy of the Enlightenment and the heritage of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century historicism have continued to vie for support and loyalty throughout the last century and have shaped many of the debates about the nature of knowledge and the character of the university and of scholarship.[10] But the terms of the debate have been greatly complexified in the last thirty or forty years. Certainly the vision of unencumbered rationality, with all of its assumptions and implications, still animates, at least as an ideal, much of the physical and social sciences and many humanistic disciplines within the contemporary university. Commitments to the professionalization of the academy, attempts to secure scientific status for social scientific and humanistic fields of inquiry, calls for recognizing and then bracketing the values of the scholar, defense of a supposedly self-evident canon, and the continued elevation of detachment and distance as scholarly virtues all attest to the ongoing appeal of modern notions of objectivity and universality.

But if the challenges of nineteenth-century historicism undermined, if not defeated, the Enlightenment notions of truth and knowledge, more contemporary assaults from across the academic and social-political spectrum have left those convictions in a profoundly vulnerable position. Within many academic disciplines, from the philosophy of science to anthropology and literary criticism, the perspectival and value- and theory-laden character of knowledge has been asserted. And across disciplines attacks have emerged, coinciding with political and social movements, from groups historically disenfranchised both as scholars and as subjects of scholarly inquiry. Feminists, representatives of numerous racial and ethnic groups, scholars from cultures, countries, and religions once subjugated by colonialism, and recently individuals

marginalized by virtue of their sexual orientation have all sought to articulate alternative understandings of knowledge and of the role of the scholar in the construction and evaluation of knowledge. They have done so on political, epistemological, and ontological grounds.

There are various permutations of these arguments. Numerous scholars, from Edward Said to David Chidester and Talal Asad and other postcolonial thinkers, have argued that the categories, methods, and claims to knowledge asserted by white, Western scholars have not been neutral in the least but the vehicles for extending Western political and economic power and for controlling, destroying, and plundering cultures, lands, and traditions not their own.[11] The great Enlightenment ideals and the academic visions of universal truth, detached inquiry, and unsituated knowledge no longer appear as irenic and benign attempts to achieve public knowledge and to adjudicate political differences nonviolently but as means to assert the ascendancy of very particular Western values and power configurations in the period of colonial, imperial, and capitalist expansion. For others, they were and continue to be manifestations of patriarchal and heterosexist power in the guise no longer of church authority but of science and modern knowledge or the manifestation of a "scientific racism" masquerading as biological science. Or again, they are thought to be the embodiment of antireligious sentiments of a secularized academy. Along with all of these assertions have come far-reaching claims about the nature of knowing itself and in particular about the relation of the identity of the knower to what is known.

Notions of singular truth expressed in a transparent relation between unsituated knowers and a given world have been replaced with assertions of knowledge as constructed, as the product of imagination and power, and as dependent upon the contextualized theories, perspectives, identities, and experiences brought to any situation. Now, one conclusion that might follow from this is an echo of that Troeltschian assertion of multiple perspectives—that is, what we now have is a plethora of perspectives, each yielding its own version of reality with none able to claim authority. While sometimes heard, such relativism is often not the claim. Instead the assertion is articulated, contra the position that maintains disengagement conveys scholarly authority, that the opposite is the case. One form of this argument has been that certain particular perspectives, while always partial and engaged, nonetheless carry with them a greater capacity for giving adequate accounts of the world.

This argument has been central to many feminists in the philosophy of science, such as Sandra Harding and Donna Haraway, who have argued

that there is no way to escape the located and perspectival character of human knowledge and that it is therefore those who are aware of this and can hence better track the relationship between values and power and knowledge who will give us more, not less, "objective" versions of reality.[12] For them, those in power have a vested interest in obscuring these dynamics, and it is finally the "subjugated" or disenfranchised who engage in such critical reflection. Hence, Sandra Harding states: "so one's social situation enables and sets limits on what one can know; some social situations—critically unexamined dominant ones—are more limiting than others in this respect, and what makes these situations more limiting is their inability to generate the most critical questions about received belief" (Harding, 236). Haraway, for her part, argues that it is subjugated perspectives that offer a more privileged perspective because "in principle they are least likely to allow denial of the critical and interpretive core of all knowledge. They are knowledgeable of modes of denial through repression, forgetting, and disappearing acts—ways of being nowhere while claiming to see comprehensively" (Haraway, 255). Hence, all scholarship and all claims to knowledge are socially situated, but differing social locations yield more or less adequate knowledge.

A variant on the privileging of social location can be found in the claim that it is really only insiders, participants or sharers of particular identities, who can know the history, understand the identity, properly express the meaning of a text or of the experience of some group. This is heard from numerous perspectives, including, as we will see, representatives of dominant social, political, and religious groups. Perhaps its most compelling advocates have, however, again been representatives of groups who have historically been assigned "nonidentities" or identities that have excluded their histories and experiences from scholarly attention and have denied them scholarly roles. From these sources a second claim has been added to the assertion articulated above concerning the import of the location of the knower or scholar, and that is the insistence that variables such as race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, class, sexual orientation, and political and religious orientation provide access to the corresponding histories and experiences that are unavailable to scholars outside those groups. Here it is not only location that provides a privileged vantage point but identity itself.

This claim moves beyond the observation that the variables of identity such as race, gender, or religious association often determine social location and hence provide certain historical and cultural vantage points to the conviction that identity itself provides or blocks access to the histories, experiences, and situations of individuals or groups.

Here it is not only where the scholar is situated that determines what she or he knows and the authority with which she or he can make claims but the scholar's selfhood that does so. As Susan Talburt states in her study entitled *Subject to Identity*, for those who espouse this kind of position "identity serves as a foundation for social recognition, inclusion, and equality; experience, constructed as coextensive with identity, offers a place from which to speak and a privileged means of representation."[13] Hence, in much contemporary academic discourse, particular identities and location are no longer the problem, something to be denied or bracketed in the name of detached objectivity, but, rather, they have become the ontological source and vehicle for knowledge. A number of implications have followed from these convictions.

One central inference that has been drawn is that only those sharing the characteristics of a group, culture, gender, and so on have the right or ability to study and know these subjects of inquiry. This is first of all a political argument about who owns and should control the histories and experiences of persons and groups. It is grounded in the recognition that outsiders have often distorted, been abysmally ignorant of, and used claims to knowledge to control those who have been studied. Almost every dominated group that has been subjected to study by those in dominant social and political positions has voiced assertions of this sort and has claimed the right to be the interpreters of their group's experience and history.

But another argument has been made beyond this historical one that is more ontological in nature about who has, so to speak, the right equipment to study and make claims about and on behalf of groups of persons. Sometimes the implication is that one's status as female or as African American or as Jewish or Christian alone makes one able to engage and know those groups—that is, vaginas, dark skin, Semitic heritage, or commitment to Jesus convey qualifications in and of themselves. At other times there is the added argument that only certain subgroups can really carry out such tasks. For example, critical feminist consciousness on the part of female scholars is a requirement for any adequate analysis of the experience of women, or cultural competency on the part of American Indians is necessary to know and represent Indian history adequately. In these assertions ontology, sometimes in a quasi-biological form, and historical or cultural experience combine to rule in certain persons as potential scholars and rule out others. Identity becomes not a hindrance to scholarship but one of the prerequisites of scholarship and knowledge.

Other implications follow as well; foremost among them is that outsiders to these groups or insiders without the requisite consciousness

are deemed illegitimate or suspect in relation to groups to which they do not belong. Hence, whites cannot do black history, men cannot carry out women's studies, Christians make poor scholars of Judaica, only believers can really understand and know a religious tradition, and so on. Both women's studies and African-American studies emerged out of these convictions that only those whose identities were tied to these groups had the authority and capabilities to speak about and on behalf of oppressed persons.[14] For many representatives of historically disenfranchised communities, a central issue, as Linda Martín Alcoff has put it, is the problem of speaking for others, and for many the scholarly watchword has become "speak only for yourself."[15] Sonia Kruks terms such a position an epistemology of provenance, noting that it entails a "partitioning of knowledge" according to group identity, experience, and location. Such a perspective holds:

> that knowledge arises from an experiential basis that is so fundamentally group-specific that others, who are outside the group and lack its immediate experiences, cannot share that knowledge. As a corollary, the argument is generally made that outsiders have no basis from which they can legitimately evaluate the group's claims about its knowledge, or those political or moral positions that it takes on the basis of them. In short, only those who live a particular reality can know about it, and only they have the right to speak of it.[16]

A variation of this is that a scholar's field of inquiry should coincide with his or her identity; especially for persons of marginalized and oppressed groups, the choice of scholarly subject matter that appears irrelevant to the struggles for liberation becomes a reason to suspect those scholars' "credentials" as a member of the group. While the scholarship of such a person may not be questioned on the grounds that the oppressed can know the oppressor, loyalty to or identification with his or her "group" is often challenged. Here the issue is not that an outsider has claimed scholarly authority about some "other" but that an insider has failed to exercise the task bequeathed him or her by virtue of his or her identity; the question is no longer who cannot study a group or topic but who by virtue of identity is obligated to do so.

CHALLENGES TO THE CONJUNCTION OF IDENTITY AND SCHOLARLY AUTHORITY

Recent theoretical proposals concerning identity and subjectivity have raised questions both about the positions embodying a longing for detachment and distance and for those asserting the intimate relation between identity and scholarship. In particular, moves away from

notions of identity as unified, stable, and singular, while certainly providing no support for traditional conceptions of objectivity and neutrality, have greatly complexified any easy correlation between identity and scholarly competence. These challenges have come from myriad sources, including from within those movements that have in the past espoused the close connections between identity and knowledge. Feminists, representatives of groups and communities in postcolonialist situations, postmodernists, and poststructuralists have all complicated the relation between identity and knowledge, specifically that knowledge labeled scholarship.

Increasingly, interpretations have emerged that stress the multiple, often unstable, or even fragmented character of subjectivity and identity. A scholar is not just, for example, a feminist but also a heterosexual, white, American, Christian academic with her own particular history that is not reducible to that of any group. All of these elements shape her identity. Should one trump all others, and if so, which one—gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ideological commitments, or religious affiliation? Is there an organizing site for identity, and if so, can she choose what that will be, or is it a given? Are subjectivities less unified than the appeals to identity suggest, with no particular element dominating or organizing all others, or varied elements having more prominent roles without some predetermined order?

And what of the relation of this kind of variegated identity to scholarship? Can our feminist, white, American, Christian, heterosexual scholar research and teach about all women, including members of different racial, ethnic, religious, and national groups, by virtue of her femaleness, or only certain ones that have precisely the same demographics as herself? Does the multiplicity of elements that compose her identity rule her an insider of many locales or render her an outsider of all? And who decides whether she is an authentic Christian, a real feminist, or a loyal American? When scholarship and knowledge are tied to identities so closely, and identities are multiplied and continually differentiated into ever more distinctive particularities, are we left with solipsistic self-reference that cannot obtain any kind of public status?

Even if one is counted, by whatever powers that be, as an authentic member of some group or another, what presuppositions about identity endow such membership with scholarly significance? Are we to suppose that being a religiously good Christian in the twenty-first century somehow provides peculiar access to first-century Christian life or fifteenth-century Christianity or twentieth-century Christianity in another locale or tradition? Even if biography, race, ethnicity, gender,

and so forth gave insight into a scholar's own experience, there is little reason to assume that this extends in some ahistorical, essentialist, or even mystical manner to knowledge of or access to a group's or tradition's history or varied permutations. As historian of Judaism Martin S. Jaffee notes, scholars are always in some way outsiders of what they are studying, and this is especially true when the subject matter of inquiry is distant from the scholar in time or space.[17] "Even those to which we have connection through the traditions of family or ethnicity, rather than through the more circumscribed traditions of the academy, are known through the tutored imagination rather than direct personal knowledge" (Jaffe, 282). The scholar's personal identity is evidence only of him- or herself. It is not, Jaffee claims, some infallible access to the experiences of others.

When we turn to evaluating the scholarly side of this equation, complications also abound. How do we decide what is good scholarship when we tie that evaluation to issues of identity. Does "authentic" identity guarantee good scholarship? Or is identity the sine qua non of good scholarship but only that—that is, a requirement but only the beginning? What other criteria should be invoked in the assessment of research and teaching? Languages? Scholarly training? Methodological sophistication? To provide good research does the group studied have to, as Wilfred Cantwell Smith once claimed, assent to what is written and said about them, and who, in those circumstances, speaks for any group?[18] Is the university itself a community whose norms should be determinative in assessing scholarship that seeks academic approval?

RELIGIOUS STUDIES, THEOLOGY, AND IDENTITY

Across most academic disciplines, especially in the social sciences and humanities, debates about these issues are being carried on vigorously and often in a contentious manner. This is also the case in religious studies and in my own subdiscipline of theology. The arguments within this context have their own flavor and particular permutations, however. Religious studies is one of the newer disciplines to receive academic stature and recognition in the university. While scholars have turned their attention to religious traditions, phenomena, ideas, and practices for several centuries, in the United States especially that study has taken place within the context of religiously affiliated divinity schools and colleges. The tradition of separation of Church and state in America ruled out until recently the study of religion in the context of public universities and colleges. With the 1963 legal decision known as *The School District of Abington v. Schempp*, which distinguished

the teaching about religion from the proclamation and promulgation of religions, the academic study of religion has greatly expanded, and with it the academy-wide search for ever-greater academic acceptance. Often, given the fears of religious evangelization in the name of scholarship and the desire to achieve uncontested academic stature, religious studies scholars have advocated, sometimes more adamantly than scholars in other fields, for precisely those notions of detachment, distance, and objectivity that shaped the early-modern ideas of scholarship and knowledge. Indeed, the rhetoric of many scholars of religion often has a distinctively antireligious sound to it, suggesting tensions between the scholar and the tradition studied and perhaps within the scholar as a religious person and an academic.[19]

When we turn to theology, the issues are even more convoluted. For many religious studies scholars and many theologians associated with conservative or traditional perspectives, theologians are by definition members of religious communities, and their work is assumed to be primarily in the service of such communities. They are quintessential insiders for whom personal identity and intellectual subject matter coalesce. Other scholars of religion identify theologians and theology not with the academic interpretation of religion but with religion itself, that is, with what is to be studied and interpreted. When one sees the term Buddhist studies, the "Buddhist" in the term refers to the subject matter of a particular academic field of inquiry, not to the personal beliefs and commitments of any scholar. In contrast, the "Christian" in Christian theology is taken not only to refer to the area studied but also to designate the identity and motivations of the scholar. Theologians might be the intellectuals of their religious traditions, but that, for those advocating modern views of the academy, does not make them academics. For much of the academy, including many scholars who accept the perspectival character of scholarship, being a theologian and being an academic are antithetical.

When we turn to the perspectives that more forcefully repudiate notions of neutrality and advocate for the recognition that there is an intimate relation between identity, including religious identity, and scholarship, the situation for theologians does not necessarily improve. Many representatives of marginalized or oppressed groups have used these arguments to assert the normativity of their perspectives. But these assertions have also been wielded with great effectiveness by conservative religious representatives to keep out critical voices. Many conservative religious proponents agree with the claims both that theologians are and should be insiders, participants within particular religious traditions and communities, and that they should seek faithfully

to serve and represent those communities. Moreover, in relation to claims both of identity (who gets to be part of a group) and of the scholarship that identity yields, it is often, as George Lindbeck has maintained about Christian theology, the adept or the orthodox who get to decide who counts as a member of the group and what count as adequate theological claims.[20] The marginal, the deviant, the rebellious, or simply the intellectually curious but religiously unaffiliated are ruled out just as surely as they were by their cohorts in other fields of the study of religion. In relation to theology, assertions of the importance of identity are often not vehicles for opening scholarship to heretofore silenced or critical voices but tools of the conservative and dominant forces within religious traditions.

For a theologian such as myself, these issues have been vexing both personally and theoretically. While raised a Catholic, I have little formal expertise in Catholic theology nor am I a consistently practicing member of that or any other religious community. My training and scholarly interests have been primarily in modern Western Protestant thought, though I am not a Protestant. Like scholars in other fields of inquiry, the designation "Christian" before my discipline, theology, indicates for me what I study and research and teach about, not that to which I personally adhere. Other qualifying terms before theology, such as pragmatic, naturalist, feminist, American, might get closer to my methodological or even normative commitments, but each represents only a segment of my perspective, and none can easily be correlated with any particular community that might be in a position to judge my credentials as a member. As a theologian, the primary community with which I identify and to which I hold myself accountable is the academy—precisely that academy that is not sure theologians should be granted entrée. This betwixt-and-between location has led me to the following reflections on the nature of religious studies, where I fit in, and what all this has to do with my identity.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS: RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY

As an academic theologian, I find myself continually having to argue for my right to maintain both terms of that scholarly designation—academic and theologian. In the course of making my case, I have come to advocate for a very definite understanding of the academy or university today. I think the assaults on early-modern assumptions from the nineteenth century onward make any easy adherence to Enlightenment-like assertions of neutrality and blank-slate objectivity

very difficult. Even more chastened, Mannheimian, free-floating, and detached intellectualism appears today like self-delusion or, worse, a less-than-benign attempt to conceal the real dynamics of power at work in the academy as elsewhere. Still, I find unacceptable as well what I take to be a too-easy collapse of identity and scholarship. While moves in this direction have contributed to the historicizing and contextualizing of scholarship and the activities of the university, they can also lead to a dangerous denial of all public criteria for assessment and to a tendency to substitute citation of authority, be it of texts, body, or land, for argumentation and evidence. When the latter is the case, previously muted voices may gain a temporary foothold, but almost always those with the most power get to decide what counts in the end.

Against notions both of the university as the site of detached knowledge and of the academy as a conglomeration of contending perspectives with no common ground, I would like to argue for scholarship and the university within which it is often housed as thoroughly historical realities. As such they reflect all sorts of values and commitments and perspectives. They emerged at a specific time in history out of very particular historical dynamics. They embody not transhistorical norms or criteria that determine what truth or knowledge is for all times but more transitory, historically circumscribed ones that determine in a very contingent manner what will count as knowledge in any given field. As such, the university is continually undergoing transformation, and its internal norms are continually being contested both from within and from without.

To be part of the university, however, does mean that one is willing to participate in such debate and argument about what counts as knowledge and scholarship. It means that one is willing to argue publicly, to present one's evidence, to make the case not by citation but through the process of ongoing critical analysis in which no presupposition, be it of method or personal history or assumed criteria, is ruled unchallengeable.

This view is not one that reverts to notions of the public as neutral or naïvely objective. Here "public" refers to the arena of contestation in which we are willing to demonstrate our wares, so to speak. The norms that shape it and the criteria that hold sway in it will continue to be altered in the face of new evidence, new voices, and new problems. Stability and agreement are not the mark of the public in this view. What is the mark is the willingness to join the historical debate and the ongoing willingness of the academy, admittedly not always evident, ever to increase the multiplicity of perspectives represented within it.

In this view of the academy, scholars are not empty vessels or blank slates. We all bring multiple elements to our work, including our

personal and communal histories inscribed in our psyches and on our bodies. We bring methodological choices and idiosyncratic loves. We bring religious commitments and political passions. We bring ourselves in all of their multiplicity. And those selves contribute to our identity and to the flavor of our scholarship. But they neither guarantee that the scholarship is good nor rule it unacceptable because it's done by a person without "the right identity." What should be the bases of those judgments of scholarly worth are the fallible, contingent, and shifting criteria of assessment upon which we temporarily agree and which we continually revise.

This vision of the academy is a normative one that I readily admit is often not embodied. It is one, however, that I believe worthy of pursuit. There are many commitments that are required if this vision is to function at all. In closing, I would like to enumerate several that I think are essential to its flourishing:

1. The Commitment to the Proliferation of Perspectives

If all of our perspectives are historical and all thereby partial, contingent, and fallible, it is important to have as many voices as possible contributing to the debate. Such inclusion entails ongoing struggle to ensure that heretofore excluded voices have access and the power to shape the debates, including the power to challenge norms and criteria of evidence and assessment. Inclusion should be generous and motley—all who are willing to enter the fray are welcome if they will engage in disciplined and critical inquiry. Skin color, genitalia, political allegiance, religious or antireligious sentiment, and so on are neither requirements nor hindrances to entrance. The commitment to scholarship is the only requirement.

2. The Commitment to Critical Reflection

The commitment to scholarship is foremost a commitment to critical reflection and inquiry. Critical reflection entails both willingness to share evidence and make one's case and willingness to scrutinize all aspects of the scholarly enterprise. In this sense the academy is clearly normative, embodying and elevating critical reflection in this particular context as a value to be pursued. Other contexts will have other values.

3. The Commitment to Accountability

This goes along with critical reflection but highlights the public or collegial aspects of academic work. There are many communities that may benefit or be harmed by our research and many ways in which we

may make our work accountable to them. But as academics per se, a major community to which we must demonstrate the strength of our work is that of our academic peers. Such accountability does not rule out other communal connections but does signal a willingness to make our case within the academy according to its norms.

4. The Commitment to Generosity and Humility

The recognition that our norms are contingent, that our perspectives are fallible, and that our debates embody varied, conflicting, and multiple values and goods often leads to struggles for control and ascendancy. In this view it should lead to commitments to generosity, to hearing out one another, to neither writing off perspectives nor sacralizing them by appeal to unargued-for authorities. And above all it should lead to a profound humility that leaves our work open to challenge and that surely knows that the work of others will supersede it.

These commitments to inclusion, critical reflection, accountability, and generosity and humility will not make scholars all alike or diminish the differences that mark our identity. They will provide, I think, the ingredients for a rich, multifaceted, transforming, and continually transformed scholarly existence.

NOTES

1. The reference to footnotes in the title comes from the Epilogue of Bruce Lincoln's *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology and Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
2. Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (New York: Free Press, 1990), chap. 1; hereafter cited in text.
3. For example, see Johann Gottfried Herder, *Against Pure Reason: Writings on Religion, Language, and History,* trans., ed., and with an introduction by Marcia Bunge (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); hereafter cited in text.
4. Georg Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present,* rev. ed. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), 37.
5. See Rolf Sältzer, ed. *German Essays in History* (New York: Continuum Press, 1991); and Iggers, *The German Conception of History.*
6. Quoted in Leonard Krieger, *Ranke: The Meaning of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 5.
7. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals,* trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1969).
8. Ernst Troeltsch, "The Place of Christianity among the World Religions," in *Christianity and Other Religions: Selected Readings,* ed. John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 11–31; and Ernst Troeltsch, *Religion in History,* trans. James Luther Adams and Walter F. Bense with an Introduction by James Luther Adams (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).
9. Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988), esp. chap. 1.

10. Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), esp. Part One. Bernstein argues for a convergence or at least interaction of these legacies.
11. See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Press, 1979); David Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1996); and Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).
12. Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspectives," in *Feminism and Science,* ed. Evelyn Fox Keller and Helen E. Longino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 249–263; hereafter cited in text; and Sandra Harding, "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology," in *Feminism and Science,* 235–248; hereafter cited in text.
13. Susan Talburt, *Subject to Identity: Knowledge, Sexuality, and Academic Practices in Higher Education* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), 8.
14. See Novick, *That Noble Dream,* chap. 14, "every group its own historian," for an analysis of the rise of African-American history and women's history.
15. Linda Martín Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," in *Who Can Speak? Authority and Critical Identity* ed. Judith Roof and Robyn Wiegman (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 97–119.
16. Sonia Kruks, *Retrieving Experience: Subjectivity and Recognition in Feminist Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 109.
17. Martin S. Jaffee, "Fessing Up in Theory: On Pro*fessing* and Con*fessing* in the Religious Studies Classroom," in *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader,* ed. Russell T. McCutcheon (London: Cassell, 1999), 281; hereafter cited in text.
18. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Towards a World Theology: Faith and the Comparative History of Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1981), 97.
19. For scholars who detect an antireligious rhetoric in the academy, see Stephen L. Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief: How American Law and Politics Trivialize Religious Devotion* (New York: Basic Books, 1993); Page Smith, *Killing the Spirit: Higher Education in America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990); George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Unbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).
20. George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 100.

2

IDENTITY AND THE WORK OF THE SCHOLAR OF RELIGION

José Ignacio Cabezón

If one believes with Gramsci that an intellectual vocation is socially possible as well as desirable, then it is an inadmissible contradiction at the same time to build analyses of historical experiences around exclusions, exclusions that stipulate, for instance, that only women can understand feminine experience, that only Jews can understand Jewish suffering, only formerly colonial subjects can understand colonial experience.

—Edward Said[1]

The position that only the subaltern can know the subaltern, only women can know women and so on, cannot be held as a theoretical presupposition either, for it predicates the possibility of knowledge on identity.

—Gayatri Chakravarti Spivak[2]

When I got my first tenure-track appointment as assistant professor of the philosophy of religion at the Iliff School of Theology in 1989, the headline in the religion section of the local Denver papers read "Buddhist Hired at Iliff." (The fact that I used to be a Buddhist monk and was no longer one led the reporter to further characterize me as a "*lapsed* Buddhist"!) Twelve years later, when I was offered a position at the University of California, Santa Barbara, the religion headlines (this time national!) read "Gay Activist Appointed to Dalai Lama Chair." The (not so subtle) subtext of the articles was similar in each case—that my identity was at odds with my job description. In the first case, at issue was the fact that I am a Buddhist. In the eyes of the reporter this seemed somehow to disqualify me from teaching in a Christian

theology school. In the second case, it was my sexual orientation and my commitment to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) issues that presumably made my appointment controversial, as if being gay and/or an activist did not mesh with teaching Tibetan Buddhism or with holding a chair named in honor of the Dalai Lama.

Even if we are not totally powerless to determine our own identities, the above instances demonstrate the extent to which who we are is not something totally within our control. Clearly there are voices other than my own that demand a say regarding who I am. Over and above characterizing us in particular ways, these same voices make other claims—claims that have to do with how we fit or do not fit, with what we should or should not be allowed to do. This, of course, is what makes identity political. That is to say, identity is a site for the exercise of power/resistance. Or rather, it has become in a pronounced way in our culture at this particular point in our history. And there are reasons for this, as Sheila Davaney's historical essay in this volume makes clear. A concern with identity as a site for power/resistance, then, is not ubiquitous. For example, I have often been struck by the extent to which Tibetan culture in this particular historical moment is relatively identity-*de*politicized. Let me explain with a tale.

AN ANECDOTE

Almost twenty years ago, when I was still a Buddhist monk, I was asked to translate for the Dalai Lama during his tour of Spain. At one point during the weeklong series of events, His Holiness was trying to explain to a reporter the extent to which Tibet had been culturally ravaged by years of Chinese colonialist subjugation. He ended his remarks by stating that once Tibetans had regained their political autonomy they would have to turn to a wide variety of experts to reestablish their cultural integrity. Nodding in my direction, he stated that Tibet would have to import people like me who had made it their life's work to study Tibet's rich religious heritage. My initial shock gave way to a kind of amazement at the Dalai Lama's willingness to use whatever resources were available to him to preserve the traditions for which he acted, and acts, as steward. Authority to speak *to* Tibetan Buddhists, to speak *about*, and even to speak *for* Tibetan Buddhism did not depend on one's place of birth or on the color of one's skin, but on one's intellectual abilities and religious commitment. Not only did one not have to be Tibetan to be a Tibetan Buddhist, one did not have to be Tibetan to represent Tibetan Buddhism, either to the West or even to Tibetans themselves.

Of course it is impossible for me to say whether the Dalai Lama still holds this view (in general or about me in particular). Still, it remains my experience that Tibetan culture is relatively hospitable and inclusive, allowing others relatively unhampered cultural access. This, however, has to be taken in historical context. On the one hand, present-day Tibetan cultural inclusivity may be a reaction to an earlier, failed, exclusivist position, the pre-1959 segregationist and isolationist policies that many Tibetans believe to be one of the main causes of the loss of their homeland.[3] On the other hand, cultural inclusivity as a strategy that opens up a culture to others is in no way an ill-advised response to Tibet's present historical predicament as a nation threatened by Chinese imperialism. To empathize with a culture, one must understand it, and to understand it, one must have access to it, and this may be another reason why Tibetans should have adopted the strategy of cultural inclusivism.

What role do these political factors play in the fact that Tibetan culture is open and hospitable to ethnic or cultural outsiders? What effect do they have on Tibetans' willingness to downplay ethnicity as determinant of authority? Would Tibetans be as "blind" to my ethnicity were I not Buddhist, not pro–Tibetan independence, and not a scholar of Buddhism? Would Tibetans evince the same degree of openness were they in a more politically and economically stable position? Such counterfactual doubts are important to entertain because, among other things, they raise the issue of the extent to which the questions and answers that concern us in this volume are conditioned by history, politics, gender, and class. Counterfactual doubts notwithstanding, however, my experience among Tibetans in the present historical moment has been one of tremendous hospitality, acceptance, support, and empowerment. For whatever reasons, Tibetans on the whole, at this particular juncture of their history, have decided not to link cultural and religious access and authority to ethnic identity. In speaking for and about Tibetan Buddhism, what matters appears to be not who you are ethnically, but what you know.

THE ISSUE

That this has been my experience among Tibetans has had an impact on my own position in the present debates on the relationship of identity and scholarship. Let me first state what I believe the debate is *not* about. The debate, it seems to me, is not about whether identity influences or impacts scholarship. After Gadamer, Said, and the feminist and postcolonial critics, there can be no question about the role that subjectivity plays in scholarship. No one (certainly no scholar of the humanities) can today seriously maintain that there is such a thing as value-free, neutral,

objective scholarship. Who we are affects what and how we do what we do as scholars and teachers. But the issue is not whether our identity *affects* our scholarship, but whether it *legitimates* (or *delegitimates*) it. Does who we are authorize (or forbid) certain forms of scholarly discourse? Does our identity bestow upon us certain epistemic or discursive privilege? Does it authenticate our pedagogy? For example, do you have to be Tibetan to teach (or to write about) Tibetan religion or culture?

Phrased in this way, the questions revolve around the scholarly privilege (if any) that comes with identity (or conversely, the lack of scholarly privilege that comes with certain aspects of identity, or lack thereof). We are faced with the question of not only whether being Tibetan qualifies one to teach or write about Tibet but also whether being Latino (or, more generally, non-Tibetan) *dis*qualifies one from doing so.

There is, conversely, another set of issues that revolves around the demands not of one's discourse but of one's identity. Does who I am *necessitate* (onto-logically, psycho-logically, ethically) what I do as a scholar or how I do it? Does the fact that I am gay predispose me or oblige me to do gay studies or to engage in any form of scholarship through a self-consciously queer theoretical lens?

Let me first give a brief synopsis of my position in regard to these various formulations of the question, and then attempt to defend it. Baldly stated, I want to argue for a kind of deregulation, or anarchism.[4] I do not believe that one's identity in any direct way privileges or authorizes one's scholarship. The legitimacy of my scholarship on Buddhism comes from elsewhere than either my private experience or my public self-identification as a Buddhist. Who one is does not, nor should it, legitimate one's teaching or scholarly work. I want to argue for the view that there is no obvious or necessary link between what I do and who I am. To write or to teach about Tibet does not require me to be Tibetan. I want to claim that even though who I am influences what I do (and how I do it), it in no way necessitates in any simple, linear fashion what or how I do what I do as a scholar. It is a matter of degree: although the subjectivity of the scholar manifests in his or her work, I do not believe that that subjectivity necessitates a fixed scholarly identity; it does not predetermine one's scholarly trajectory.

Even though being a gay, white, Latino Buddhist clearly means that I see the world in certain ways, this does not translate in any *obvious* fashion into my scholarship. It certainly does not drive me (onto-deterministically, psycho-predispositionally, or ethically) to engage in scholarship on these aspects of my identity, nor does it compel me to engage in the scholarship that I *do* engage in through self-consciously

queer, white, Latino, or Buddhist theoretical lenses. When I do engage one or more of these lenses in my scholarly work, it is as a choice motivated by my scholarly agenda and not out of any compunction.

My purpose here is to suggest a radical dichotomy between identity and scholarship generally, and not simply that such a dichotomy exists between *my* identity and *my* scholarship. In other words, I believe that *no* aspect of *anyone's* identity privileges *any* aspect of her scholarship, regardless of who she is or what she does. I claim that *no* form of scholarship requires as a prerequisite for engaging in such scholarship that one have a specific identity; and conversely, that *no* aspect of one's identity compels one in any way to engage in any specific kind or mode of scholarship. My tendency is to put forward these positions as universally true theses; that is, as theses that are true for everyone in all contexts. This is an important point to make, lest it seem as though the position that I am advancing is idiosyncratic to my particular situation as a subject.

One further clarification, by way of anticipating an objection, is perhaps in order. It may well be the case that, in a derivative and indirect way, identity may positively affect scholarship. For example, being born Latino may mean that one is fluent in Spanish or it may act as an impetus to deepen one's intellectual understanding of Latino culture, either of which would enhance one's scholarship in a field such as Latino studies.[5] However, what is *actually and directly* going to enhance one's scholarship in this field is not the mere fact of being Latino but that of being fluent in Spanish or of having an intellectual commitment to the study of Latino culture, neither of which is essential to being Latino and both of which are traits shared by non-Latinos. In this case, then, identity serves at most as a kind of secondary, contingent condition for scholarly privilege. That it is a contingent and not a necessary condition is important, for clearly there is no necessity (whether onto-logical, psycho-logical, or ethical) at play here. There is nothing intrinsic to my being Latino that necessitates my being fluent in Spanish or that mandates from me an intellectual commitment to this aspect of my identity.[6] While being raised Latino obviously has epistemological and psychological consequences, none of these are of such a kind or, indeed, so "strong" as to predetermine in a fixed and linear way my intellectual commitments. Nor does my being Latino *ethically* mandate an intellectual commitment to my culture. The same is true, mutatis mutandis, as regards other aspects of my identity (sex, class, race, sexual orientation, etc.).

One can imagine many different variants of the example I have just cited. We might, for example, consider the case of a woman ritual expert

whose sex gives her access—in her fieldwork among, say, Muslim women—to ceremonies that are forbidden to men, and whose scholarship is, therefore, in this regard, privileged. Or again, one might imagine a case where a white anthropologist is unable, because of the history of white colonial oppression of a certain indigenous people, to elicit the cooperation of informants who are otherwise ready and willing to share their knowledge with an indigenous scholar. Or once again, one might imagine the not-so-imaginary case where rampant societal prejudice against gays and lesbians or against persons with physical disabilities means that a whole class of people is never given the opportunity to develop a public scholarly voice, much less scholarly privilege. Certainly these are cases where identity creates or prevents scholarly privilege; but they are also based on the contingencies of culture and history. The impediment or privilege in each case has to do with the context (cultural, historical, sociopolitical) and not, or so I maintain, with one's actual identity.

In short, there is nothing about who I am that from the get-go gives me an intellectual upper hand. Likewise, there is nothing about who I am that puts me at an intellectual disadvantage from the start. Culture and history may stand in the way of our doing the kind of scholarship we want to do, but then these are limitations imposed on us contingently by circumstance. They have nothing intrinsically to do with our identity.

THE DEFENSE

With these qualifications behind us, let me turn now to a defense of my position. The most forceful argument for the position that sees no necessary connection between identity and scholarship is an empirical one. It is, after all, a fact that white professors write successful and important monographs on African-American working women;[7] that African-American scholars write influential books on white philosophers;[8] that straight women write convincingly and insightfully about gay men;[9] that Catholics write seminal books on Buddhism;[10] and that straight men teach successful courses in women's studies.[11] Of course no scholarship is immune from criticism, and it is always possible retrospectively and under the influence of an identity-political agenda to read into these works errors that come to be portrayed as the result of these various scholars' experiential distance from their subject matter. But such a move is highly suspect, if for no other reason than that "identity authors," those who write and teach what they are, also make mistakes. Identity distance from one's object of study is no more

determinative of shoddy scholarship than closeness is determinative of accuracy.

Besides, we know for a fact that even we ourselves—the "experts"—cannot tell the difference between a work written by a man or a woman, a Chicano or an Anglo. Consider the following thought experiment. In the early days of computer science, scholars could not avoid the interesting philosophical questions that their new discipline seemed to imply. Among these was the question of whether computers were (or could eventually become) conscious. But how was one to determine whether or not a machine was conscious? What actually constituted having consciousness? Alan Turing, one of the great pioneers in the field, suggested a very practical protocol for determining whether or not a machine was conscious.[12] In a remote conversation (via a keyboard, say), any computer capable of fooling a human being into thinking that it was human was for all intents and purposes conscious. This protocol came to be known as the Turing test.

Now consider a modified version of Turing's test. Let's call it the Turing Identity test. A man sits alone in a room in front of a computer screen. He is told that he will have two sets of conversations: one with a woman, and one with a man feigning to be a woman. (One can of course imagine a whole host of such experiments having to do with various aspects of identity; e.g., one can imagine sex being replaced by race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality, religious affiliation, and so forth.) Will the man who is the subject of the experiment be able to distinguish between the woman and the man feigning to be a woman? Suppose our subject cannot so distinguish in a statistically significant number of cases. It might be argued that this is evidence for the claim that identity does not translate into self-representational ability (*lege* privilege): that women are no better at representing themselves as women (in the medium of language at least!) than are men. Vice versa, if our subject can so distinguish in a statistically significant way the woman from the man feigning to be a woman, then one might conclude that identity is important to self-representation: that who you are does impact your ability to represent that aspect of your identity.

Let me first say that to my knowledge such an experiment has never been done. However, there is a sense in which we ourselves as a culture have been repeatedly put to such a test. Consider, for example, the relatively recent case of the young male screenwriter who, unable to find a job, began to write pseudonymously as an elderly woman; or more notoriously, the case of *The Education of Little Tree*, a book that was hailed as a classic of Native American literature until it was found to have been written by a white man of dubious ideological views

concerning race; or the case of Danny Santiago (actually Daniel James), the author of the "Chicano" novel *Famous All over Town*, who, in the words of Gates, "created a great deal of embarrassment for all those critics who hailed his purportedly 'authentic' Chicano novel for capturing the 'true voice' of the Mexican American people;"[13] or once again, the case of the more recent book *Fragments*, which was touted as accurately recounting the impressionistic memories of a young Jewish child in the Nazi death camps—until it was learned that the man who wrote the book was in fact neither a Jew nor a victim of the concentration camps. Do not these various examples signal to us that we have in some sense failed the Turing Identity test? Do they not demonstrate that someone who is not Chicano, an Indian, or a Jew is capable of convincingly representing Chicano, Indian, or Jewish experience to the point of deceiving even culturally literate members of these very communities? "But surely," it will be retorted, "these cultural-literary frauds are not scholarly modes of discourse." This is of course true, but if such literary hoaxes have not been perpetrated in the academy to the extent that they have in literature, it is probably for one simple reason: there is little economic incentive to do so. Scholarly frauds of this type simply do not pay (or if they do pay, they do not pay much).

The notion that identity privileges scholarship would appear on first blush to serve the interests of minority scholars, protecting, as it were, subsets of the field of knowledge as the sole purview of those who "embody" them. In this view, women's studies *belongs to* women, queer studies to queers, Buddhist studies to Buddhists, and so forth. In this logic, to be is to have exclusive access, and not to be is tantamount to "hands-off." While seeming to work to the advantage of minority scholars, however, such a segregationist view often works against us. As Roof and Wiegman state, "speech founded on its representativity as 'minority speech' is often an authorized guarantee for continued, albeit newly visible, social subordination."[14] For example, such segregationism ultimately denies us access to the field of knowledge as a whole, for if to study or to teach *x* requires us to be *x*, then, conversely, not to be *x* puts us at a disadvantage when it comes to (or worse, utterly excludes us from the possibility of engaging in) scholarship on *x*. To claim that only women can do women's studies means that only men can do men's studies, and therefore, that women are excluded from studying men. Women could not study Plato, Africans could not study Hegel, Jews could not study Christians, and the colonized would have nothing to say about their colonizers.[15] Given the fact that—by their very nature as subaltern fields—ethnic, women's, and queer studies represent a quantitatively minoritarian

portion of the total field of knowledge (at least as this is presently constituted in the Western academy), the segregationist view ultimately limits minority access to the vast portion of the field of knowledge. It thus serves the purpose of the hegemony by forcing minority scholars into disciplinary ghettos that isolate and disempower us.[16] We stand to lose much more than we stand to gain from adopting the segregationist position.

We may stand to lose, but of course our employers do not. With the mainstreaming of subaltern discourses, these voices have become commodities that need to be offered for sale in universities if these institutions are to remain competitive. At the same time, the liberal ethos of the academy requires the physical presence of subaltern bodies. Any ideology that promotes a coincidence of minority bodies with minority discourses, as the segregationist ideology does, is to the economic advantage of our employers. Under such a program, diversity of identity and of discourse are achieved simultaneously: two birds with one stone, or, more accurately, buy one, get one free.[17]

There are other problems—epistemo-logical ones—as well. To claim that you have to be *x* to understand (or to write about or to teach) *x* makes it seem as though all identity-based scholarship will arrive at the same conclusions. But this presumption that identity leads to unanimity has been repeatedly challenged. Consider the example of the womanist challenge to feminist studies in religion and theology. These examples could be multiplied. Then there is the separate issue concerning which aspect of identity will take precedence when these yield radically different views on a given issue. Consider here the polemics between Hannah Arendt and Ralph Ellison over the fundamental "solutions" to racism in the South. Arendt and Ellison come to different conclusions: the former believed that the solution lies in the dismantling of the social and legal structures of oppression, especially the antimiscegenation laws, while the latter believed that the fundamental solution lies in equal access to education and employment. What is more, Arendt actually criticized African-American parents for forcing their children to attend integrated schools when this was potentially dangerous to them. Ellison, on the other hand, believed that this was a necessary, even if difficult, decision. What is important for our purposes is that each of these scholars perceived themselves as authorized by and arguing from the proximity of their identity to the object of their analysis: Arendt, from the identity positionality of a persecuted minority and a woman "writing in sympathy and solidarity with African American children";[18] Ellison, from his lived experience as a southern African American. Eventually Arendt acquiesced to

Ellison; but consider the questions that Lakritz (1995: 13) raises in this regard:

> [Arendt] foregoes her authority in relation to an individual who has a still greater claim to authority, since Ellison is an African American who has the primary experience to support his claim. Should Ellison have the last word in this controversy? In what sense, according to what scale of values, is Ellison's experience a better authority than Arendt's? Ellison refers to himself as an African American from the South; he knows how black parents feel about this issue because he's been there, yet why should that experience take precedence over Arendt's identification with the mothers?

In other words, when it comes to interpretive authority, what aspect of identity trumps what? Should race trump sex, or should it be the other way around? Of course, one solution (my solution) is to say that no aspect of identity trumps any other aspect, because the validity of arguments does not (or at least should not) depend on identity.

It is by now a well-known fact of history that one of the most potent and enduring forms of racism in Europe invoked a rhetoric that tied the racially other to nature. The indigenous peoples of Africa and the Americas in particular were seen as intrinsically tied to nature. By contrast, Europeans were portrayed as having made a split with nature, a split that allowed for the emergence of "civilization." For Europeans, so the racist ideology goes, nature and culture were distinct. For the racially other, they were identical. This purported distancing of culture (the locus of the refined human) from nature (the locus of the instinctual, the savage, the animal) in the Christian West was believed to have allowed not only for the emergence of the arts but also for the emergence of science (in a broad sense), which required such a distance from nature as a prerequisite to the objectification of nature.

I believe that we find a structurally similar type of racialist ideology mimetically, albeit more subtly, recapitulated in the belief that identity is tied to scholarship. To claim, for example, that African Americans have intrinsic access to African-American culture as an object of scholarly pursuit is in effect to claim that African Americans are intellectually tied not to nature broadly construed but to *their* nature. What they do coincides with what they are. Just as in another age Africans had been thought unable to separate themselves from nature, so now African Americans are believed to be unable to effectuate the split and achieve the distance between their intellectual pursuits and their nature qua identity. In this sense, African Americans belong *naturally* in African-American studies. That the same should be true for Anglo-Americans (that they, too, should *naturally* belong in Anglo-American studies) is belied by the facts of history; for white Europeans

and Americans have "proven" themselves capable of mastering fields beyond their own cultural sphere, not only the cultures of others but also the acultural, extranatural realm of theory.[19]

I frequently confront the oddity—the unnaturalness—of my being a Caribbean Latino who studies Buddhism, and I often ponder the extent to which I myself have internalized this unnaturalness, learning to laugh at my "unusual" predicament: that my scholarship should be "so at odds" with my ethnic identity. Of course my teaching and scholarly work is no more at odds with my ethnicity than is the scholarship of a white European who studies Buddhism, but no one finds it strange or humorous that white Americans or Europeans study Buddhism. Humor, of course, is only a symptom (and a relatively benign one) and not the "disease." The disease, if my diagnosis is correct, is more fundamentally a cultural logic that demands that my actions as an ethnic other in North America be naturally and intrinsically tied to my identity. "Actions" here must be broadly understood, for it refers as much to my deeds as a scholar as it does to my deeds as a Buddhist. As a recent conversation with an African-American Buddhist friend has made clear to me, it is in some sense even funnier in this culture of ours that we (African Americans and Caribbean Latinos) *be* Buddhists. How so? On the one hand, Buddhism is stereotyped as a religion of passionlessness. On the other, people of African and Caribbean descent suffer a long history of being stereotyped as a people tied to passion—as a people whose very nature (blood) *is* passion (hot). Hence there arises a cultural dissonance, an oddity, and therefore a certain cause for amusement at the very notion of an African-American or Caribbean Buddhist.

IDENTITY AND RELIGION

These very last remarks bring us to a series of issues that set us, as scholars of religion, and our concerns apart from others who have previously contemplated questions of this sort.[20] Rarely, for example, has the discourse on the politics of identity seriously considered religious identity as part of its agenda. This is not to say that our own discipline of religious studies has ignored questions of the relationship of religious identity and sensibility to the work of the scholar of religion. In fact, a recent volume is devoted precisely to these sorts of questions.[21] There the issue is envisioned chiefly as a debate between the proponents of a sui generis and of a reductionist approach to the study of religion. Is religion susceptible to the same forms of analysis as any other human, cultural-historical artifact? Or, to the contrary, does religion,

because of its supposed uniqueness, require a distinctive method of scholarly study separate from (or in addition to) those already available to us in the human and social sciences? In particular, is religious commitment or a special religious sensibility required for an adequate understanding of religion? Does one have to be religious to understand religion or Buddhist to understand Buddhism? Of course to answer the latter two questions in the affirmative is to commit oneself to the view that I have criticized above; that is, to a view that privileges scholarship on the basis of (this time religious) identity. I reject the privileging of scholarship on the basis of religious identity as much as I reject its being privileged on the basis of any other aspect of identity. This of course makes me an opponent of the sui generis view. Religion, in my view, is not unique. It can be understood using the panoply of naturalistic and secular methods already available to us in the human and social sciences. Religious identity (whether this is viewed as a commitment to a specific religious tradition or as a generic religious empathy or sensibility) is not a prerequisite to the scholarly study of religion nor is it a precondition of the adequacy or validity of such scholarship.

My taking this position, however, does not put me in the reductionist camp, for reductionism, as this position has been formulated by many of its contemporary proponents, is not a mere alternative to (in the sense of being the simple negation of) the sui generis view of religion. Instead, the reductionist view goes on to affirm that scholarship in religious studies *has no place for the religious understanding of religion*. Now, the religious understanding of religion contains (even if it is not coterminous with) theology. Hence the reductionists argue for the exclusion of theology as a form of discourse within the academy.

I would like to situate myself somewhere in between the sui generis and reductionist positions, arguing for a kind of proliferative anarchy of discursive forms within the academic study of religion. To be rejected, in my view, is any ideology that would limit discursive options on the basis of the religious identity of the scholar or on the basis of a scholar's decision to write unapologetically from an overtly religious viewpoint. The sui generis view would limit our discursive options by insisting that one must be religious (or that one must have a religious sensibility) to explain religion. The reductionist view would also limit our options, in this case by calling for the exclusion of, for example, theological discourse (a form of discourse in which the speaker/writer self-identifies, within the very context of the speaking/writing, with a specific religious identity).[22]

Obviously, not all discourse is appropriate within the academic study of religion, but what makes a particular discourse inappropriate—what disqualifies something as scholarship in our field—has nothing to do with whether the scholar is religious or nonreligious or whether she rhetorically assumes a religious or secular stance in her writing. Contra the sui generis view, there is plenty of good scholarship that is the work of men and women who claim no religious affiliation, empathy, or sensibility, just as there is of men and women who *dis*avow any such sensibility. Contra the reductionists, there is plenty of good scholarship that is self-avowedly religious. When we know this to be the case empirically, is it not time that we stopped indulging those theorists who demand of us that we submit to their imprimatur, whether they be of a sui generis or a reductionist variety?

FROM WORK TO IDENTITY

By thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature. He develops his slumbering powers and compels them to act in obedience to his sway.

Karl Marx[23]

According to Hegel . . . contemporary man was the worker. It was the slave . . . who by means of his work changed the world; and it is the slave in the end who is changed in his essence by work. . . . In particular, intelligence and knowledge are the fruits of the labor to which the slave was constrained. It is in this way, we should point out, that work engendered man.

Georges Bataille[24]

Hegel . . . conceives labour as the essence, the self-confirming essence of man; he observes only the positive side of labour, not its negative side.

Karl Marx[25]

Up to this point my primary concern has been with criticizing the view that would in a linear, causal way link identity to scholarship by claiming that who we are privileges (or worse, determines) what we do as scholars and teachers. Among other things, such a view usually assumes a monolithic and static notion of identity: our racial, ethnic, and sexual identities are fixed and given.

I would now like to turn the issue on its head and argue for a kind of converse view by suggesting that we examine *the role that scholarship (work) plays in the construction of our identities.* My identity in fact is not a given but is constructed in dependence upon a variety of factors, not the least of which is *the work that I do.* In opposition to the view that we must do what we are, I would like to argue now that who we are is in large measure the result of what we do. As academics, of

course, we are to a large extent the by-products of our intellectual work, in Harold Bloom's sense of being or becoming what we read,[26] but I believe there is a more profound and problematic way in which work constructs identity. This requires that work be positioned within the historical, political, and economic contexts in which it is actually done, and to this I now briefly turn.

There are, as I have mentioned, several ways in which our labor defines us as persons. In modern times the relationship between work and identity has found important, even if disparate, analytical expressions in the writings of Hegel and Marx. It is of course beyond the scope of this essay to explore the differences between these two thinkers on this issue. Suffice it to say that Hegel was right to point out that such a relationship exists, and Marx was right to point out the problematic nature of such a relationship: that the conditions under which we work can (and, more specifically, under capitalism does) have a negative impact on who we are and what we become.[27]

For me, then, at least at this point in my life, the really pivotal question is not so much the theoretical issue of whether my identity privileges (or determines) my work but the more practical question of how institutional forces (the vectors of power in the larger institution of late capitalism) influence my work, which in turn impacts my identity. Put more simply, I am more interested in how capitalism impacts our identities through its impact on our work. How do the institutions in which we find ourselves enmeshed define and control the parameters of our intellectual, personal, and communal lives? Given the roles that the academy in general and our institutions in particular play in constructing the boundaries of acceptable/required work, and given as well the constitutive role that our work plays in the construction of our identities, what kind of persons are we being propelled to be? Are these the persons we want to be? Are these the person that our students and our various "communities of solidarity" *need* us to be?

This is obviously not the place to proffer answers to these questions. Suffice it to end with this observation: even if, as I have argued, what we do may have little to do with who we are, the converse is probably not the case, given that our identities are (increasingly, it seems to me) overdetermined by the work that we do. When this is so—when our work and the structures in which work transpires have such an impact on who we are—perhaps it is time that we begin to shift our preoccupation from a politics of identity to a politics of scholarship or, better, to a politics of the academy, leaving behind us all attempts to control who can say what, so that we may begin to work collaboratively to

change the structures that prevent us from becoming what we need and are needed to be.

NOTES

1. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 31.
2. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "A Literary Representation of the Subaltern: A Woman's Text from the Third World," in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 254.
3. Melvyn C. Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).
4. This is at least consonant with, even if not identical to, the position expressed by Said and Spivak that I include epigrammatically at the beginning of this essay, as well as with that expressed in another more recent work by Said: "But there remains the one problem haunting all intense, self-convicted and local intellectual work, the problem of the division of labor, which is a necessary consequence of that reification and commodification first and most powerfully analyzed in this century by George Lukács. This is the problem sensitively and intelligently put by Myra Jehlen for women's studies, whether in identifying and working through antidominant critiques, subaltern groups—women, blacks, and so on—can resolve the dilemma of autonomous fields of experience and knowledge that are created as a consequence. A double kind of possessive exclusivism could set in: the sense of being an exclusive insider by virtue of experience (only women can write for and about women, and only literature that treats women and Orientals well is good literature), and second, being an excluding insider by virtue of method (only Marxists, anti-Orientalists, feminists can write about economics, Orientalism, women's literature). This is where we are now, at the threshold of fragmentation and specialization, which impose their own dominations and fussy defensiveness, or on the verge of some grand synthesis which I for one believe could very easily wipe out both the gains and the oppositional consciousness provided by these counter-knowledges, hitherto." Edward Said, "Orientalism Reconsidered," in *Europe and Its Others: Proceedings of the Essex Conference on the Sociology of Literature*, ed. Francis Baker, et al. (Colchester, UK: University of Essex, 1985), 25–26.
5. Identity has, of course, acted as an impetus to scholarly study not only idiosyncratically but programmatically as well. In our own discipline of religious studies, it was of course women who founded the subfield of women and religion, gay people who pioneered queer theoretical analyses of religion, African Americans who launched black theology, and so forth. Identity, therefore, can be a tremendous motivating force when it comes to scholarship. Especially when a particular aspect of one's identity has served as the basis for persecution on the part of the dominant culture, it is natural for those who share such an identity and who hence experience such persecution to turn their intellectual gifts to the analysis of the aspect of their identity that is the basis for their subjugation. But the question remains: Is identity, even when motivated in the fashion just described, a *necessary* cause of scholarly privilege? It seems clear to me that it is not.
6. Given that there are many different aspects to one's identity, and given as well that it is practically impossible to gain intellectual expertise in regard to each and every one of these, how would one even go about choosing which aspect of one's identity to privilege? For the essentialist, who sees the relationship between identity and scholarship as being one of necessity, this is a serious problem.
7. Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).
8. Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1989).

9. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosexual Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).
10. Étienne Lamotte, *Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien: Des origines à l'ère Saka.* Bibliotheque du Muséon, vol. 43 (Louvain: Institut Orientaliste, 1958).
11. J. Scott Johnson, et al. "No Middle Ground? Men Teaching Feminism," in *Teaching What You're Not: Identity Politics in Higher Education,* ed. Katherine J. Mayberry (New York: New York University Press, 1996).
12. See A. M. Turing, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence," *Mind 59* (1950), 433–460. To talk to an artificial intelligence source of the type that Turing had in mind—in this case her name is Alice—go to http: //www.alicebot.org/ and click on "Talk to Alice."
13. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Ethnic and Minority Studies," in *Introduction to Scholarship in Modern Languages and Literature,* ed. Joseph Gibaldi (New York: Modern Language Association, 1992), 288–302.
14. Judith Roof and Robin Wiegman, eds., *Who Can Speak: Authority and Critical Identity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), x.
15. Lavina Dhngra Shankar, in "Pro/Confessing Otherness: Trans(cending)national Identities in the English Classroom," in *Teaching What You're Not: Identity Politics in Higher Education,* ed. Katherine Mayberry (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 204–205, makes this same point more eloquently.
16. Cornel West, I believe, makes a similar point when he states that "Black intellectual work and Black collective insurgency must be rooted in the specificity of Afro-American life and history; but also are inextricably linked to the American, European, and African elements that shape and mold them. Such work and insurgency are explicitly particularist though not exclusivist—hence they are international in outlook and practice." See bell hooks and Cornell West, "The Dilemma of the Black Intellectual" in *Breaking Bread: Insurgent Black Intellectual Life* (Boston: South End Press, 1991), 145.
17. A similar point is made by Shankar (1996: 203): "from an administrative perspective, it is, perhaps, cost-effective for departments to fulfill both their goals of canon expansion and affirmative action by having 'persons of color' teach literature written by and about other 'colored folk.'"
18. Andrew Lakritz, "Identification and Difference: Structures of Privilege in Cultural Criticism," in *Who Can Speak: Authority and Critical Identity,* ed. J. Roof, and R. Wiegman (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 11; hereafter cited in text.
19. Of course, to be consistent, those who claim that identity imparts epistemic and therefore scholarly privilege should not distinguish between, say, the privilege enjoyed by an African in regard to African culture and that enjoyed by a white European in regard to white, European culture. Each racial, ethnic, or gender (etc.) group should hence be tied intellectually (the skeptic would say narcissistically) to itself as an object of inquiry by virtue of the self-referentially focused scholarly privilege it enjoys. The segregationist logic would seem to require that white, Euro-American Protestants also restrict their scholarship to that which coincides with their identity, but of course the early-modernist, racist view acts as an alibi. If white Europeans have, as this view maintains, effectuated a split with nature, they have also achieved a split from *their own* nature that allows them to escape the strictures that force their scholarship to coincide with their identity. Whereas the subaltern others must suffer the intellectual apartheid that restricts their scholarship to their identity, the dominant self enjoys free reign over the entire field of knowledge, over its own and others' cultures. In addition, the ideology that intellectual segregationism does not apply to the hegemony can always bolster its view by appeal to history, for in the last three centuries it can hardly be denied that white Europeans have quite "successfully" engaged in the scholarly study of other cultures.

20. For example, Katherine J. Mayberry, ed., *Teaching What You're Not: Identity Politics in Higher Education* (New York: New York University Press, 1996); and Judith Roof and Robin Wiegman, eds., *Who Can Speak: Authority and Critical Identity* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995).
21. Russell McCutcheon, *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader* (London: Cassell, 1999).
22. Please note what I am not arguing here. I am not claiming that the reductionists believe that one must be nonreligious to engage in religious studies scholarship. Such a view may indeed exist (for example, among those who maintain that religious commitment compromises scholarship on religion): You cannot expect a Christian to be objective about Christianity, or a Christian to be unbiased about Buddhism, or any religious person to be impartial about religion. But such a view is clearly less prevalent since the demise of Enlightenment notions of objectivity. No, reductionists do not make such claims. Clearly, their concern is with discourse about religion and not with identity, their claim being that there is no place in the academy for religious discourse on religion. Insofar as there is one form of religious discourse on religion that presumes the religious identity of the speaker/writer—to wit, theological discourse—and insofar as the reductionistic view excludes such discourse, it excludes one form of scholarship on the basis of identity. It is this latter aspect of the reductionistic view that I find problematic, akin as it is to the (absurd) view that would prohibit literati from engaging in scholarship on literature.
23. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy,* ed. Frederick Engels, revised and amplified by Ernest Untermann (New York: Modern Library, 1906), 198.
24. Georges Bataille, *The Tears of Eros,* trans. Peter Connor (San Francisco: City Lights, 1989), 61.
25. Karl Marx, "Critique of Hegel's Dialectic and General Philosophy," in *Karl Marx: Early Writings,* trans. and ed. T. B. Bottomore (New York: McGraw Hill, 1963), 203.
26. Lavina Dhngra Shankar, 201.
27. In Marx this has been thematized in the notion of *alienation.* For a useful overview of the Marxist analysis of alienation, see Richard Schmitt and Thomas E. Moody, *Alienation and Social Criticism* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1994). The remarks that follow are clearly influenced by Marx's views of the way human beings under capitalism become alienated—from themselves, from each other, from nature, and so forth. I am aware, however, that the classical Marxist view needs to be modified or, more accurately, amplified to explain more effectively the particular forms of alienation specific to the present conditions of our socioeconomic life under *late* capitalism.

3

RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AND THE STUDY OF BUDDHISM

Francisca Cho

BETWEEN OBJECTIVITY AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL PRIVILEGE

In this essay, I will explain how I have come to an epistemological middle ground between the principles of objectivity and privilege by detailing my various identities, which may be described as "betwixt and between" a number of boundaries, and how they have shaped my approach to my work. These identities encompass the inborn characteristics of being Korean and female and are supplemented by the factors of cultural upbringing and professional institutional environment. Most importantly, the line of development between my personal identities and scholarship has led me to a particular view of some current trends in Buddhist studies, which is my academic home. I offer this view in part as a critique of what I see but also as a demonstration of how my own historical embeddedness has led me to it. Hence my offering is double-edged but ultimately optimistic, for I believe that the perspectives posed by our individual histories are also the means by which we can overcome our limitations in knowledge. Such transcendence is a collective enterprise that is inimical to the interiorizing strategy of "epistemological privilege."

I am a Korean-born woman, raised and educated in the United States, who works in the area of Korean and Chinese Buddhism at a Jesuit department of theology. I reject claims of epistemological privilege based on biological or ethnic identity, not only because my experiences as a

scholar do not support such claims but also because I find them intellectually problematic. I define modern scholarship as a public form of knowledge that utilizes standardized modes of reason and methods of verification so that its claims are both intelligible to and contestable by others. This understanding of how knowledge is formed and perpetuated is inimical to concepts of epistemological privilege that imply a private form of knowing accessed solely by virtue of inborn characteristics of identity. In my own experiences as a scholar, however, I have found that adherence to public standards of knowledge does not disembody scholars or scholarship from the peculiar imprints of history or personal biography. In fact, standards of knowledge themselves are never self-existing givens, and whole bodies of scholarly knowledge, such as Buddhology or Buddhist studies, can be viewed as historical institutions that have been driven by culture-specific interests.

My reticence about embracing the principle of objective and self-evident standards of knowing is shaped by my interest in critical and cultural theory, which I define as an academic discourse that reflects upon (and overtly criticizes) the political, social, and cultural orders that shape our forms of knowledge. I would insist that this critical consciousness is not only the result of my awareness of critical theory as a Western academic tradition, however, but perhaps more so a result of my immersion in Buddhist thought and culture. My area of research has consistently focused on the Buddhist critique of language, particularly in the East Asian Chan/Zen tradition, and my interest in literature has led me to look at the strategies that the Buddhist tradition has taken in order to utilize language without succumbing to what it sees as language's shortcomings. This investigation has cultivated in me an awareness of the rhetorical and linguistic performances that pervade the academy and has increased my appreciation of the performative nature of our own scholarly activities, which in turn has instilled a skepticism that they apprehend some absolute, reified "knowing." Hence my scholarly investigations into Buddhism have cultivated a self-reflexive "Buddhist" critical awareness of the nature of scholarship. The propositional and argumentative language games that are the stuff of scholarly careers are explicitly indicted, for me, by the Buddhist rejection of dualistic thought in its religious pursuit of a higher, liberating truth. Although this does not suffice for me to self-identify as a "Buddhist," it has been a persistent point of my scholarly writings that the methods and purposes of my work—that is, my own scholarly practices—are open to the critique of Buddhist theory and hence to revision or reformulation in light of that critique.[1]

To summarize the impact of this syncretic, Buddhist-critical sensitivity, I hold to the principle that any form of knowledge or knowledge

claim is valid relative to the institutional and social field of that knowing. This does not make me a relativist or someone who has capitulated to the epistemological black hole of subjectivity. The concept of knowledge simply makes no sense to me outside of specific contexts of knowing. The scholar of religion, for example, as well as scholars in other disciplines, is trained in the methods, ethos, and processes of the academy, which qualifies her to practice and perpetuate that institution's particular forms of knowing. Because the academy is a human institution with a history, and because critical theory has made reflection upon that history part and parcel of scholarly knowledge, the symmetry between academic knowledge and the biographies of those who produce that knowledge is a self-evident and unremarkable fact.

On the other hand, the institutional pursuit of self-awareness and self-correction is what gives the academy the right (as well as the obligation) to raise the standard of objectivity. In this context, historical and biological limitations *can* be a virtue, as suggested by the argument of privilege, to the degree that they force recognition and incorporation of subaltern experiences as a corrective to dominant narratives of who we are. In this sense the argument of epistemological privilege is a useful method of instilling collective self-transcendence. To raise it as an end in itself, however, is pernicious because it fosters the opposite result of a purported private knowledge. To be situated between objectivity and epistemological privilege, therefore, means to accept (or reject) both by qualifying them—objectivity is historically located and progressive, and the argument of privilege is a skillful means but never an absolute truth. Modern scholarship, as a very public form of knowledge, is in an ideal position to practice both, and its struggle to recognize and overcome its own limitations can also make it akin to a spiritual practice.

PERSONAL IDENTITY AND THE STUDY OF RELIGION

As a Korean-born woman who engages in the study of Korean Buddhism, I do not fit the description of most people working in Buddhology, which historically has been a Western-European and American body of knowledge. Nor do I fit the description of the native scholar. Because of my appearance, people routinely assume that my scholarship is an extension of my personal experience or, at the very least, that I draw from a deep well of personal cultural contact. For better or for worse, this is not the case. My family moved to America when I was six years old. I quickly adopted English and all things American. While it is common for comparative religious scholars to spend years abroad in

the culture of their investigation, I find this acutely difficult because my Asian and female aspects are in fact hindrances rather than passports to cultural access. Trying to function within Korean society encumbers me with native demands and restrictions that are inimical to my very American sense of self. These restrictions are rarely imposed on white Americans or Europeans. It is best, in fact, first to accomplish rebirth as a Caucasian male in order to become a scholar of East Asia, particularly Korea. Korea's puniness relative to the presence of China and Japan in Western consciousness makes Koreans particularly welcoming of American attention. Additionally, South Korea's reliance upon American military protection against the communist North mirrors premodern Korea's willing recognition of China as its political and cultural sovereign and has the similar effect of compelling a desire for recognition and validation in the eyes of the greater foreign power.

In my particular case, then, Asian ethnicity—coupled with gender—is a factor of identity that provides very little in the way of privileged access or knowledge of my scholarly topic. This situation suggests that the claim of epistemological privilege based on identity is a simplistic idea in part because its concept of identity is simplistic. My Korean appearance is belied by my cultural upbringing, and this situation in turn belies the Korean belief that blood is—or ought to be—thicker than culture. I count on my scholarly identity to privilege and defend me against the claims of the ethnic community, including its claims on my scholarship. Korean scholarship on Korea often has the odor of tribalism about it. This can be clearly linked to the global politics of Korean nationalism, which more or less follows the model of Japan's "national learning" (*kokugaku*) and "Japaneseness thesis" (*nihonjinron*)—strategies that assert a unique cultural identity as an antidote to the superior political might of other nations. In order to avoid these ideological tangles, which also inform attempts to establish "Koreanology" as an academic discipline, my work does not reify the construct of "Korea" and "Korean Buddhism." I construct my history in broader strokes that trace the transformation of Buddhism in East Asia and the variations of that transformation at particular points in time and location.

Given this particular dynamic between my ethnic identity and my area of scholarship, the obvious solution would seem to be to cling to my scholarly identity in order to shield myself from the complicated demands of ethnicity. I have found this strategy to be useful, but only to a point. This is because there is another disconnect between my particular identity and area of scholarship: I do not fit comfortably

with the historical interests and biographies that have driven the field of Buddhist studies. As I look back on my years of apprenticeship and existence within the Western academy, starting with my entry into graduate school in 1985, I realize that my sense of distance from this scholarly and institutional history has been more significant to my work than my detachment from my ethnic identity. The reason for its greater significance, I believe, has a lot to do with doing scholarship on religion, which is a field of study that cannot seem to escape the question of the scholar's own religious commitments.

Perhaps my reasons for thinking this has something to do with my home institutional setting. I teach in a department of theology at a Jesuit university. Although the department does not have a graduate program, its large role in the core curriculum (all students must take two courses in theology) accounts for the size of the department—twenty-seven full-time faculty, to be exact. Since the 1970s, the composition of this faculty has increasingly diversified from an all-Jesuit body into a faculty in which a range of historical traditions as well as scholarly methods are represented. The resulting pluralism of the department of theology has pressed two questions of identity to the fore: What is the role of the department in maintaining the Catholic identity of the university? And what are the differences between scholars who call themselves "theologians" and those who call themselves "scholars of religion"?

In my interactions with the department, my identity as a Buddhist scholar has caused little complication, and my presence has been embraced as an important element in the breadth of the department.[2] It is my identity as a scholar of religion, however, and my questions about what it is that theology is and does that have been met with some uneasiness. In our "theology versus religious studies" debates, the anxieties that are most often expressed are reactions to suggestions (perceived and real) that theology, which presumes the Christian commitments of its practitioner, is less than objective, less than critical, to wit, less than scholarly. Add to this the element of Catholic affiliation and persistent Vatican threats upon academic freedom, and the anxieties increase manyfold. In my limited awareness of the scholarly practices of the theologians in my department, vocal calls for rigor in method and adherence to historical-critical interpretation seem to be strategies for neutralizing doubts about the qualifications of theology for membership in the academy. Clearly, scholarly practices do not evolve according to some set of natural laws that govern the march of knowledge but rather as responses to particular anxieties about self-identity in relation to one's work.

Within this institutional context, I have been led to reflect on the assumption that scholars of religion who confess no affiliation with the traditions they study are freer in some way. In my experience of my own field of Buddhist studies, it seems to me that scholars of religion (who are supposedly unencumbered by religious commitments) also struggle with the nexus between personal identity and scholarship—even if in a negative way. A clear example of this is the sector of religious studies that attempts to purge the study of religion of all traces of "theology," defined as the desire to hypostatize religion, and to substitute in its place a purely "naturalistic" and historical analysis of religion.[3] It is this strategy, needless to say, that has put theologians on the defensive. The scientific study of religion may be proposed as one method among many, but any vehement attempt to draw a distinction between methods implicitly carries the argument of "mine is better than yours" and provokes the question of personal commitments. If we look specifically at the case of Buddhist studies, the same question about the impact of personal identity and commitments on scholarship comes to the fore.

BELIEF AND DISBELIEF IN BUDDHIST STUDIES

Buddhist studies might be cast as the child (or orphan) of the successive enchantments and disenchantments of the West with Asia. The current wave of postcolonial reflections in the field has made this fact explicit.[4] This history of East-West cultural encounter is biographically reflected in the current composition of scholars of Buddhism operating in American universities. This group is largely made up of white males who came of age during the Vietnam era and who, unlike their predecessors at the turn of the previous century, came to Buddhist studies as the result of personal spiritual interest. As Donald Lopez notes, "As these scholars . . . enter their mature years, their personal interest has either waxed or waned, been confessed or repressed, yet its importance in the recent history of Buddhist Studies is not to be underestimated."[5] My reading of current Buddhist scholarship and attendance at conference presentations tell me that Lopez could not be more right. One expression of the current historical moment, for example, is the construction of "Buddhist theology," in which some of these same scholars have chosen to confess their Buddhist identity—a confession that one prominent name in the field confided to me would have amounted to professional suicide back in the 1970s—and to admit the close relationship between that identity and his or her scholarship.[6]

Apart from this stream of scholars who have chosen to come out of the closet, much of current Buddhist scholarship is only obliquely self-reflexive, including, oddly enough, the scholarship that uses postcolonial criticism in order to rectify previous representations of Buddhism. Much of this work is done in what I call the "apostasy mode." By this I mean to refer to the scholarship on Buddhism that aims to dismantle romanticized representations of Buddhism by means of and in favor of historical analysis. Although I am in no position to comment upon the personal "faith" status of those who engage in such scholarship, the tone of the scholarship itself often suggests an underlying process of self-rectification—a personal process of purging the expectations and failed promises of Buddhism as a refuge from the tawdriness of life in the disenchanted West. This dynamic is particularly visible in the sectors of Zen studies and Tibetan Buddhist studies, which are, not surprisingly, the Buddhist cultures that have been most fancied in the West. Much of the current spate of scholarship aims to show us another side of these idealized spiritualities, a side that is historically entangled in the all-too-mundane structures of power and authority. Such work indicts previous apologetic constructions of these traditions as distortions of history that have been constructed by the West's own desirous imaginations.[7] Although it is in the very nature of scholarship to effect paradigm shifts that redefine the realms and methods of knowledge, one can also observe that the direction of these shifts are dictated by historical/biographical evolution. The current shift from enchantment to disenchantment in such "apostasy" scholarship certainly reflects the influence of cultural studies, but close examination reveals the additional element of religious (anti)commitments.

Robert Sharf's essay "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism" is in lockstep with the general trend of revisiting Japanese Zen historically.[8] This historical approach has the advantage of offering a perspective that balances the romanticizing approaches of some past scholarship and popular works. Sharf's own agenda in this article is to scrutinize the dominant images of Zen created by D. T. Suzuki for Western audiences—images that were also quite influential in the coming of age of current scholars of Buddhism. Sharf's essay takes the postcolonial critique and uses it against Suzuki by styling him as a reverse orientalist who constructed an idealized image of Japanese Zen and culture in order to advance his own culture's prestige. According to Sharf, Suzuki's Zen appropriates Christian valorizations of personal religious experience and represents Zen as the highest fulfillment of this value—all for the greater glory of Japan and Japaneseness. According to Bernard Faure, "If the Western standpoint represented an Orientalism

'by default,' one in which Buddhism was looked down upon, Suzuki and Nishida [Kitaro], among others, represent an Orientalism 'by excess,' a 'secondary' Orientalism that offers an idealized, 'nativist' image of a Japanese culture deeply influenced by Zen" (*Insight*, 53). Sharf agrees and elaborates:

> The irony . . . is that the "Zen" that so captured the imagination of the West was in fact a product of the New Buddhism of the Meiji. Moreover, those aspects of Zen most attractive to the Occident—the emphasis on spiritual experience and the devaluation of institutional forms—were derived in large part from Occidental sources. Like Narcissus, Western enthusiasts failed to recognize their own reflection in the mirror being held out to them. ("Nationalism," 140)

Sharf's rendition of Suzuki's reverse orientalism—to wit, the use of a Western construct (direct religious experience) to represent an Asian one (Japanese Zen) in order to elevate the latter ("Japan/Zen does it better") makes an interesting point. Suzuki was well schooled in normative Western religious currents and clearly used this knowledge to advantage in the presentation of Zen thought to Western audiences. Whether or not this resulted in the wholesale misrepresentation of Zen by Suzuki, however, is not self-evident. Neither is the conclusion that Suzuki's representation of Zen was motivated only by cultural chauvinism.

Sharf's conclusions about Suzuki's representation of Zen are based on some troubling intellectual moves of his own. This first consists of his absolute distinction between East and West, Buddhist and Christian, by insisting that the construct of "religious experience" is the exclusive property of nineteenth-century Protestant theological hermeneutics. This insistence has led Sharf, in other articles, to claim that the concept of religious experience is completely absent in Buddhism, even in its meditative traditions.[9] This claim is counterintuitive to dominant native and Western understandings of Buddhism as a whole, as well as of Zen. A great deal of Zen scholarship has in fact focused on medieval lineage histories that rhapsodize over a "special transmission outside scriptures" (Chinese: *jiaowai biechuan*), that "point directly to the mind" (*chizhi renxin*) to "see one's nature and become Buddha" (*jianxing chengfo*).[10] These Zen mantras were introduced to Western audiences by Suzuki himself, and it is clearly this Zen tradition that Suzuki had in mind in his representation of Zen as the pursuit of direct religious experience.[11] If the history of this discourse, which was formulated centuries before Suzuki, does not suffice as an indigenous concept of direct religious experience, then one might accuse Sharf of his own form of orientalism in his specification of "religious experience" to

such narrow, Protestant theological proportions that it is not surprising that it is absent in Buddhist history.

But what is the point of such absolute distinction making? Why construct a concept for the sole purpose of depriving Buddhism of it? This question can be addressed by way of examining Sharf's second intellectual strategy, which is to counterpose the discourses of religion and history as if they are competing claims. As a historian, Sharf makes the point that what most contemporary Americans idealize as real spiritual experience should not be confused with what Zen Buddhists were talking about and their reasons for talking about it. The more historical-critical view of the Zen rhetoric of immediacy and direct experience is that this rhetoric has as many political purposes as religious ones and that it has been given far too much prominence in Western images of Zen. Fair enough. But Sharf's insistence that there is *no* concept of religious experience in Buddhism, as opposed to insisting that there is a very different one, suggests that there is more at issue here than the proper historiographic reconstruction of Zen.[12]

Sharf's relentless suspicion of Suzuki's intellectual practices seems to be driven by a fundamental need on Sharf's part to question the metaphysical reality of any and all notions of "religious experience." Sharf accounts for his own scholarly practice by identifying himself as a historian of medieval Zen monasticism, which in his estimation is little concerned with the episteme of "experience." But the larger point seems to be to air his own religious skepticism: This "direct experience" was and is not real, but only a form of rhetoric, and therefore not a part of the real history of religions, Zen or Western. Sharf's discussion of this issue habitually skips back and forth between emic and etic criticism by confusing metaphysical and historical categories. He argues, for example, that Buddhist meditation texts display no agreement about categories of meditative states nor the normative techniques to achieve them. As a result, Sharf concludes that meditation has no "ostensive object" or phenomenal referent ("Modernism," 261; "Experience," 105–07). But this is no more than his own countertheological argument against the reality of a sui generis "religious experience." To argue that there is no Zen concept of religious experience because there is no consensus about the nature of that experience or because Buddhist meditation texts offer no proof for the reality of such meditative experience is an act of category confusion. Whether or not such experiences are possible, and whether or not the literature on such experience in Buddhist texts is cogent, this does not suffice to argue that the ideal of such experience was not historically real nor a part of the history of Zen tradition.

Sharf negates the history of Buddhist prescriptive and normative discourse on meditative experience via his own metaphysical skepticism about such experiences. He does this ostensibly in the name of history—such experiences never occurred, is his claim, and those who invoked such experiences were apologists with self-interested motives for doing so. Sharf's way of opposing history and metaphysics, however, renders his own historical discourse into another form of theology or, rather, an antitheology about the reality of religious experience. In principle, religious studies, in distinction to theology, is unconcerned with the veracity of religious claims and dwells only in the descriptive realm. But descriptive agendas are never inherently obvious or self-imposing, and to pretend that they are creates the risk of intellectual blind spots. The recent historical orientation in Zen studies is intellectually promising in its ability to balance and diversify methods of study. But if the antitheological motivation is left unchecked, this historical method is liable to commit some intellectual omissions of its own. Sharf's wholesale rejection of Zen rhetoric in favor of the "real history" of Zen, for example, is vehement to the point of throwing out the baby with the bathwater.[13] At the very least, it causes him to overlook and neglect legitimate options for doing descriptive and comparative work.

To begin, there is nothing morally or intellectually remiss in comparing concepts with different historical origins and arguing for similarities. Comparisons are, by definition, the imaginative and arbitrary juxtapositioning of disparate things for the purpose of creating new knowledge. If the Western valorization of direct religious experience, which stems from its unique religious history, creates an elective affinity for and interest in the Zen rhetoric of immediate experience, this is as good a basis as any for comparative analysis. Scholarly discourse cannot advance without such willful constructions, and even Sharf's own historicist privileging of the differences rather than the similarities is a part of the comparative dialectic. In addition, Suzuki's strategy of using language from one tradition in order to form a bridge to another is a practice that has been utilized repeatedly in the history of Buddhism. Particularly in the passage of Buddhism from India to China, the technique of *geyi*, "concept matching," used Daoist terms to translate Buddhist ones. There are limitations to the usefulness of this technique, of course, but both Buddhist and contemporary scholarly practices recognize that the hermeneutical process of learning what is unknown must inevitably begin with the familiar.

For those who wish to bring a more historical-critical and less theological-constructive approach to religious studies, such work can

be effectively done without assuming the hostility and mutual exclusivity of history and theology. Hence one might, for example, look at the relationship between the rhetoric of religious experience and the institutional and social forces shaping that rhetoric in Zen Buddhism and modern Christian theology. The use of critical theory to interpret rhetorical practices in light of social forces does not necessitate an either/or choice between a presumably "real" history and "false" theology. One can choose a more inclusive approach that assumes a dynamic and mutually influential dialectic between thought and action as well as between "our" categories and "theirs." The tacit requirement that theology and metaphysics be free from the interests of power in order to be counted as real only reveals a peculiar cultural prejudice that is perhaps in and of itself religious.

CONCLUSION

This limited investigation into some current work in Buddhist studies convinces me that theology and religious studies are not so divergent. Both are forms of scholarship that struggle with and refract the impact of personal commitments. I do not believe that this is more the case in the study of religion than in other disciplines. The topic of religion, it just so happens, has the effect of making one's own identity a point of explicit attention. My students always assume that I am a Buddhist or at least think that they have the right to know if I am. After years of attempting to hide behind my scholarly identity, I have concluded that what they demand to know is intuitively proper and relevant. This intrusive query into my own commitments is annoying but ultimately an advantage for maintaining my critical awareness of the indissoluble link between identity and knowledge.

My particular dilemma is that this link in my case is difficult to characterize. The fact that I cannot identify with the Asian nativist agenda nor with the Buddhist orientalist one certainly does not mean I am free of interests and anxieties of my own. Perhaps it will take another era and another viewpoint in order to make these connections explicit. I can say for certain, however, that the deviance of my identity from the majority of those who populate Buddhist studies accounts for the fact that my scholarship does not manage to fall within mainstream Buddhological practices. Although I consider myself an American, I am Asian-born, and it is difficult for me to see Asia in the category of an "other" and therefore to participate in the patterns of courtship that have characterized Western scholarship. One persistent aspect of this courtship—on both the upside and downside of infatuation—is the

mystique of otherness and the desire to penetrate it through various strategies of discernment. The current historical impulse in Zen studies, for example, is one way of ensuring that East is East and West is West, and of ensuring as well that only "the experts" have the credentials to leap back and forth between them. My interest in comparative studies and the intellectual premises that enfranchise comparison, on the other hand, inclines me against hypostasized views of culture and any method of scholarship that presumes some privileged access to the core or essence of that culture. The dominance of philology in traditional Buddhist studies, for example, postulates classical languages and canonical texts as the locus of Buddhism. This linguistic focus, one might add, is a sure way of separating the men from the boys, or the Buddhist experts from the growing numbers of Buddhist enthusiasts. My own work does not focus on the translation and exegesis of elite canonical texts, which have been the standard route to obtaining one's credentials in Buddhology, but rather on popular and vernacular texts.

In current methodological debates, the predication of a "real" Buddhism seems to persist. This is in part a result of the construct of "otherness" but also a reflection of particular cultural tendencies to hypostasize the construct of "religion." The current movement in Buddhist studies to look beyond scriptures to Buddhist ritual and social practices is an interesting case in point. This impulse would seem to signal a radical paradigm shift away from the dominance of textual studies, perhaps driven in part by disenchantment with the normative claims of such authoritative texts.[14] But the strategy of throwing over these normative claims in favor of the actual practices of people maintains the dualistic tension between theory and practice. This assumed polarity between what texts say and what most people actually do is in turn another way of making an argument for where "real" Buddhism lies. Even in the context of elite monastic culture, Robert Sharf's privileging of history over the metaphysical conceits of Buddhist rhetoric is another stipulation about what "authentic" Buddhism is.

The particular concern in current Zen studies to correct reigning Western misconceptions about Zen has the interesting effect of perpetuating the image of Asia as an intellectual commodity that only scholarly experts can access. Buddhological distinctions between naïve, popular readings of Zen and scholarly knowledge of Zen display more than a pragmatic interest in protecting Buddhology's own version of epistemological privilege. The separation also evinces a faith or a need to keep Buddhism (and religions generally) "pure."[15] This impulse seems again to be rooted in implicitly religious values. If Zen is no longer a metaphysically pure entity, it is still nevertheless something

distinct and autonomous. Perhaps the liminality of my own identity creates in my scholarship a propensity toward boundary violations. I am neither "purely" Asian nor "purely" Western, and although I am female, I have always felt quite comfortable in the "male" world of academia. In terms of my subject, I believe that Western representations of Buddhism have already become Asian representations and were probably never entirely Western to begin with. My work steers consistently to those moments when text meets context, when religion meets culture, and when East meets West and sees these moments as fruitful rather than dangerous. I am more and more drawn to Western popular appropriations of Buddhist thought and practice through poetry and the arts, for example, in addition to the realms of traditional Buddhist practice that are stigmatized by most Buddhological circles as "not real Buddhism."[16]

I came to the study of religion in college after considering and rejecting numerous other concentrations—philosophy, political science, and history. My reasons for rejecting these disciplines and finally settling upon religious studies now seem cogent and telling: those other departments demanded capitulation to rigid guild definitions and practices—"to describe, analyze, and predict human behavior" in the case of political science; to analyze "between ten and one hundred years of the life of one nation" as the thesis requirement of history. Religious studies, on the other hand, was fruitfully ambiguous (some worry needlessly about this) and left me free to explore my conviction, à la my reading of Max Weber, that ideas are important to the way people behave and that "religion" is a rubric for identifying those ideas that move people.[17] Most marvelous of all, I was not required to immerse myself in any actual religion. Instead, I occupied myself with the idea that beneath the secular face of Western modernism lurked convictions of distinctly religious dimensions and that those convictions were more discernible within the cultural discourses of science and social consciousness rather than within the realm of "religion" proper.

My decision to pursue Buddhist studies in graduate school was hardly presaged by my undergraduate course of study, but, upon reflection, the decision seems logical. I was inspired by some vague sense that Buddhism was my "heritage" (despite growing up Catholic) but I was more riveted by the self-cannibalizing claim of Buddhist texts that to be saved by Buddhism entails discarding it. The "Dharma as a raft" and the "finger pointing to the moon" are popular Buddhist metaphors that warn against the error of fixating upon "religion" as an end rather than the expedient vehicle it is meant to be. This lesson, coupled with the tradition's historical laxity on the matters of cultural

syncretism and orthopraxis, seemed to confer permission to search for religion across the diverse spectrum of human engagement. The desire to locate and safeguard "real Buddhism" seems wrongheaded to me, then, from both the intellectual and spiritual angles, and though I have never sought personal refuge in Buddhism, I believe my intellectual approach to it (dare I say it?) makes me a pretty good Buddhist.

I do not imagine for a moment that because of all these things I offer a better representation of Buddhism, whatever that might mean. I only hope to do what scholarship is supposed to do, which is to offer correctives to previous practices and methods that are but links in a continuous chain of self-adjustments. In this respect, the creation of scholarly knowledge is self-referential and self-creating—a semiotic play that unfolds according to the patterns and possibilities of discourse. To reiterate an earlier point, I find it difficult to keep the insights of Buddhist theories at bay in reflecting upon my own scholarly practices. This is perhaps because the final boundary that I cannot maintain is the distinction between spiritual and scholarly practices. I still struggle with the question, "Are you a Buddhist? Or a scholar of Buddhism?" because I cannot accept that these are mutually exclusive categories. I see the meanings that I create as functions of the moment, historically circumscribed, which will soon enough dissolve into the vast emptiness of everything that is. But to reiterate another point, I do not view myself as having succumbed to a relativist vision of private worlds. The insight of critical theory that knowledge is wedded to history and biography represents true progress toward knowledge. Indeed, it is the only avenue that allows us to get outside of ourselves (eventually) in a public and observable way without having to resort to some reified notion of epistemological transcendence.

NOTES

1. My article, "Leaping into the Boundless: A Daoist Reading of Comparative Religious Ethics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 26:1 (Spring 1998): 139–165, details how such a self-reflexive critique might work. In this article, I use philosophical Daoism to offer a critique of ethical theories, particularly as they are applied to comparative contexts. As a comparativist, I have become more and more convinced that the purpose of comparative scholarship in religions is not to understand the "other" in some definitive, objective way but to use the comparison as a way of reflecting back on ourselves and the limited way in which we know things.
2. I do not know what my identity as a scholar of Buddhism elicits in the way of presumptions about my religious identity. Most students assume that I am a Buddhist; what my colleagues know or presume is likely to vary.
3. Some examples of such naturalistic scholarship include Walter Burkert's *Creation of the Sacred: The Tracks of Biology in Early Religions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); and Pascal Boyer's *The Naturalness of Religious Ideas: A Cognitive Theory of*

Religion (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). Some scholars specifically argue for the virtues of naturalistic studies in specific objection to theological studies of religion, such as Russell McCutcheon in his *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

4. See, for example, Donald Lopez, Jr., *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). J. J. Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter between Asian and Western Thought* (New York: Routledge Press, 1997), provides a nice discussion of the phenomenon of "romantic orientalism," and it complicates the tendency to read Said's construct of orientalism as a simple distinction between West and East that corresponds to the distinction between exploiter and exploited.
5. Donald Lopez, Jr., "Introduction" in *Curators of the Buddha,* 10.
6. The relationship between Buddhist identity and Buddhist scholarship yields a variety of results. Rita Gross, for example, defines Buddhist theology as constructive thought that utilizes a historical set of principles for the purposes of contemporary living; *Soaring and Settling: Buddhist Perspectives on Contemporary Social and Religious Issues* (New York: Continuum, 1998); whereas others see their work as a continuation of native categories of Buddhist scholarship and practice. See the range of essays offered in *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars*, ed. Roger Jackson and John Makransky (Surrey, UK: Curzon, 2000).
7. In Zen studies, Bernard Faure's *The Rhetoric of Immediacy: A Cultural Critique of Chan/Zen Buddhism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), and *Chan Insights and Oversights: An Epistemological Critique of the Chan Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), hereafter cited in the text as *Insight*, have established the benchmark for postmodern critical analysis of Zen. The books unearth the political stakes behind Zen metaphysical debates as well as the historical variations in Zen practice that are repressed by its own (and Western scholarly) apologetics. In Tibetan Buddhist studies, Donald Lopez has emerged as the most prominent of postcolonial commentators on Tibet. His *Prisoners of Shangrila* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) looks specifically at the history of Western representations of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism.
8. "The Zen of Japanese Nationalism" appears in *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism,* ed. Donald Lopez, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 107–160; hereafter cited in text as "Nationalism."
9. See Sharf, "Experience," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998): 94–116; and "Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience," *Numen* 42 (1995): 228–283; hereafter cited in text as "Experience" and "Modernism," respectively.
10. Although based on seventh- and eighth-century sources, the concept of "no reliance on words" (*buli wenzi*) and its appeal to direct experience was pointedly formulated during the Song dynasty (tenth to thirteenth centuries) as part of a debate on the utility of literature and learning in the attainment of moral and spiritual goals. This debate was not limited to the Buddhist context but in fact was replicated in the neo-Confucian sector, with which Buddhists had much contact. The swings between the "conservatism" that valued institutional learning and the "radicalism" that rejected it is very much evident in the long history of Chinese Buddhism as well as Confucianism.
11. Albert Welter's "Mahākāsyapa's Smile: Silent Transmission and the Kung-an (Kōan) Tradition," in *The Kōan: Texts and Contexts in Zen Buddhism*, ed. Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 75–109, offers a more recent examination of the textual basis and the historical location of the Zen concept of a special transmission outside of scriptures.

12. Janet Gyatso's "Healing Burns with Fire: Facilitations of Experience in Tibetan Buddhism" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67:1 (March 1999): 113–147, also challenges Sharf's claim about the absence of experience in Buddhism, particularly in the Tibetan context. After looking explicitly at discourses on meditative experience, Gyatso suggests that Sharf's characterization of religious experience, even in the Western context, is overly narrow. See also Ann Klein, "Mental Concentration and the Unconditioned: A Buddhist Case for Unmediated Experience," in *Paths to Liberation: The Mārga and its Transformations in Buddhist Thought*, ed. Robert Buswell and Robert Gimello (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992).
13. Sharf is not alone in his tendencies. Robert Buswell's *The Zen Monastic Experience* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992) similarly poses the distinction between "real" monastic practices, which are ritualistic and discipline-oriented, and the false image of Zen held by the West as the pursuit of spiritual breakthrough through meditation. Buswell's actual point is that meditative practice is a comparatively small aspect of Zen monasticism, usually limited to an elite population of the monastery. His zeal in making this point, however, has the effect of posing a distinction between a real and false Zen. One can make the counterpoint, however, that there are differences between what Zen monastics do in the trenches of everyday practice and the dominant concerns of Zen theory without demanding that one choose between them in some attempt to get to the essential truth about Buddhism.
14. Some scholars, such as Gregory Schopen, have been arguing against the textual paradigm for years and therefore do not fall into the category of "enchanted-disenchanted." Nevertheless, Schopen's scholarship, in arguing practice against text, also makes an explicit argument about the location of real Buddhism. See Schopen's "Archeology and Protestant Presuppositions in the Study of Buddhism," in *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers in the Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), 1–22.
15. Sharf (in "Modernism") picks the unlikely targets of Alan Watts and Eugen Herrigel in arguing against the concept of direct experience in Buddhist meditation. These popularizers of Zen seem out of place in such a scholarly article. Their invocation by Sharf clearly suggests a distinction between scholarly Zen and popular Zen along a corresponding axis of real Zen and false Zen.
16. In "Imagining Nothing and Imaging Otherness in Buddhist Film," for example, I look at Zen Buddhism and film. Bae Yongkyun's "Why Has Bodhi-Dharma Left for the East?" was created by a Korean who learned most of his Zen through Western texts and translations. From a Buddhological perspective, Bae's Buddhist status is rather problematic, I would suspect, and so is the idea of a modern film as a Buddhist text; in *Imag(in)ing the Other: Filmic Visions of Community*, ed. David Jaspers and Brent Plate (Atlanta, GA: Scholar's Press, 1999), 169–195. In *Embracing Illusion: Truth and Fiction in* The Dream of the Nine Clouds (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), I look at texts on the boundary of the recognized Buddhist canon—specifically at fiction—and assume the continuity of monastic and non-monastic practices rather than their rupture.
17. This history was enacted at Brown University from 1979 to 1983. The religious studies concentration was perhaps one of the loosest in its requirements, demanding only one mandatory course on the history and method of the study of religion and leaving the rest to our own imagination. This department was situated in a university already (in)famous for its loose curriculum—Brown has nothing in the way of a core requirement. Whatever the failings of this system (and there were many, undoubtedly), for me this was a match made in heaven, and this is where I intellectually came of age.

4

FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTNOTES OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

Pamela Eisenbaum

INTRODUCTION

Two propositions regarding the role of religious identity and the scholarly study of religion inform this essay. First, a scholar's religious identity is irrelevant to the study of religion generally as well as to the study of a particular religion or religions. My claim for the irrelevance of identity is analogous to the situation that can be empirically observed in other fields of academic inquiry. Political scientists do not need to be avowed Marxists to be given credence as specialists in Marxist political theory. Similarly, I do not think one must be Jewish to possess credible expertise in Judaic studies.

The other proposition I want to uphold is this: that certain aspects of scholars' religious identities motivate and/or influence scholars' perceptions of the religions they study. The veracity of this claim must be conceded simply because of the perspectival nature of all knowledge. The question then arises: "Does the scholar's identity privilege the scholar epistemologically in any way? Does *being* an American, say, give one privileged access to the scholarly investigation of America? . . . Does *being* Jewish provide one with an epistemological advantage as a scholar of Judaism?"[1] For me, the answer to these questions is an unambiguous "No." I think one can develop profound knowledge, wisdom, and insight about cultures or religious traditions not one's own. At the same time, a scholar's religious identity or personal views about religion in general will no doubt impact her scholarly work. Nevertheless,

being an insider to a religious tradition—or being an outsider, for that matter—does not in and of itself provide epistemological advantage, nor is it determinative of scholarly conclusions.[2]

I intend to illustrate the complex, dynamic relationship that exists between religious identity and the scholarly study of religion through my own personal and professional lens. First, I will weave together autobiographical information about my religious and professional identity with general reflections on the issue. These reflections, I hope, will problematize the very question of religious identity. Second, I will highlight the history of research in one area of my field, Pauline studies, in order to illustrate that inside a broad scholarly arena, one with commonly agreed-upon scholarly standards but that also encompasses a diversity of perspectives, personal religious identity is not determinative of scholarly conclusions. Where, however, scholars within a particular religious tradition have not enjoyed the benefit of commonly agreed-upon scholarly standards among people of diverse perspectives, or where a religious perspective has been either threatened and persecuted or, conversely, has gone unchallenged by other views, religious identity is more likely to be predictable, and apologetics rather than scholarship are more likely to prevail. Finally, in keeping with the spirit of this essay, I will offer some brief conclusions that are both personal and scholarly.

A JEWISH NEW TESTAMENT SCHOLAR

My professional identity in academe, in the public arena, and, I must admit, in my own self-perception is as a *Jewish* New Testament scholar. I am currently associate professor of biblical studies and Christian origins at Iliff School of Theology, a school related to the United Methodist Church. Although my title may sound general, I am a specialist in New Testament and Hellenistic Judaism, though most of the courses I teach at Iliff, including the required two-part Introduction to the New Testament for students studying for Christian ministry, are in New Testament literature.

Just so there is no confusion, I am not a convert to Christianity. That is, I am not "ethnically" Jewish while professing Christian belief. When I was growing up, my family belonged to Conservative and Orthodox synagogues. I was bat mitzvahed and attended religious school in addition to public school. Currently, I occasionally attend synagogue and am often a speaker or participant at events sponsored by Jewish organizations. I am "Reform" in terms of Torah observance, which is to say I am not an observant Jew, though I am faithfully observant about a few practices, particularly certain holiday-specific

ones. But in spite of not being observant, my irregular attendance at synagogue, and my having an unusual job (unusual for a Jew, that is), my religious identity is unambiguously clear to me: I am Jewish. I think this sense of identity reflects a typical American-Jewish attitude. Jewish identity is primarily dependent on an orientation toward other Jews and Jewish life and a self-understanding that regards oneself as part of Jewish history and tradition.

My need to stress my Jewishness[3] comes partly from my encounters with others who think I must actually be Christian, perhaps a Jewish Christian, because I am a scholar of the New Testament and early Christianity. When I first began teaching at Iliff, there was such a suspicion from members of the local Jewish community, but this dissipated within a few years as local Jews witnessed my participation in Jewish life. Still, when I speak in churches or to mixed audiences, I am often questioned—sometimes even challenged—about being a Jewish New Testament scholar: "Are you really Jewish?" "Are you a messianic Jew?" "Do you believe the New Testament is true?" or "If you don't believe the New Testament is true, and don't believe Christ as proclaimed in the New Testament, why would you want to study it?" In other words, I am repeatedly asked to justify the relationship between my personal religious commitments and my scholarly focus on Christian origins.[4]

Although I think Jews teaching the New Testament in university settings may receive similar responses on occasion, I suspect that my identity as a Jewish New Testament scholar is partly caused by my institutional setting: a Christian school of theology. In university settings, especially large ones, many people teach what they are not. But at schools with an explicit religious affiliation whose primary purpose is the preparation of women and men for religious leadership, professors have not ordinarily been outsiders to the traditions they teach. So one of the reasons that the emphasis of my professional identity is on my Jewishness is because the insider/outsider tension seems so starkly realized in my case. I am a Jew who teaches Christians, many of whom will become Christian ministers, what they need to know about the history, development, and interpretation of Christian scriptures. My "otherness," in other words, is defined not only in relation to what I study but also in relation to those whom I teach.[5]

While many people find it strange, incredible, or inappropriate that Jews become New Testament scholars, other people, including many contemporary academics in religious and biblical studies, believe that Jews offer a special or unique perspective on the New Testament precisely because they are Jews. Those who hold this view usually have two reasons for it. First, Jews have often been victims of Christian brutality.

Christians have traditionally construed the Jew as the quintessential "other" and persecuted Jews mercilessly as a result. According to this view, because of the long history of Christian anti-Judaism and modern anti-Semitism, Jews should be given a privileged voice in the academic study of the New Testament and Christian origins. Second, there has been an increasing awareness on the part of Christian scholars of the Jewish context out of which New Testament texts come. Jews, it is argued, are able to offer a better understanding of this Jewish context because they already possess a Jewish perspective.

Whether one views my being a Jewish New Testament scholar favorably or unfavorably, both perspectives I have so far articulated assume there is some sort of predictable epistemological connection between who I am as a Jew and my scholarly work. Some people believe I am either not entitled to be a New Testament scholar or inadequate to the task of teaching New Testament because I am not a Christian. Others believe I should hold a privileged position in the scholarly arena because of my Jewish perspective. Both positions presume that the results of my scholarship are affected by my being an outsider in relation to my object of study. If people view the combination of personal and professional identity I represent unfavorably, they assume I am epistemologically underprivileged. If people view me favorably, they assume I am epistemologically privileged.

In my view, whether or not my perspective aids or inhibits my field of study can be judged only by my ability to persuade (or not, as the case may be) my scholarly peers. It would be dishonest to deny that I have a perspective on the subject I study, a perspective informed by my personal religious identity as a Jew. Indeed, I hope this perspective aids in my making a scholarly contribution to the study of early Christianity. But I cannot claim that simply having this perspective at the start will result in any scholarly advancement, and I cannot predict my conclusions on any given matter prior to undertaking a thorough inquiry into the subject, following the canons of scholarship, including the ability to be self-critical about my biases. If I could make such predictions, the process of scholarly inquiry would be pointless.

One of the primary problems with a deterministic view of the relationship between identity and scholarship consists in even more deeply embedded assumptions about what constitutes one's identity, religious or otherwise, namely, how should scholars determine who counts as an "insider" regarding any particular field of study? Or, conversely, who counts as an "outsider"? Furthermore, as other writers in this volume have pointed out, it is difficult to predict whether being an insider or being an outsider will hinder or engender epistemological privilege.[6] There are far too many variables involved, since there is an

infinite number of possible combinations between any field of study and the factors that make up a scholar's personal identity.

At one obvious level, I am indeed an outsider to my subject of study. As I have already made clear, I am a Jew and not a Christian, and yet I teach Christian texts in a Christian institution. Furthermore, there are clear boundaries in the modern world between Judaism and Christianity; they are two distinct faiths. On the other hand, I am really not as much of an outsider as it may at first seem. Indeed, I often think of myself as an insider. There are two primary reasons I feel this way: (1) the historical period in which early Christian texts were produced reflects a time when the boundaries between Judaism and Christianity were not yet established, so the religious identity of the texts themselves is ambiguous; and (2) in academic circles I am regarded as much as a New Testament scholar as any of my Christian colleagues.

First, while people intuitively think of the New Testament as Christian scripture, the overwhelming majority of the documents comprising the New Testament were written by Jews at a time before there was any such thing as Christianity. Because of the subsequent canonization of these twenty-seven particular texts, these documents are now considered "Christian." But in their own historical context, scholars now think of them, or at least most of them, as Jewish sectarian literature. The Jews who produced the writings of the New Testament were, to be sure, Jews who believed in Jesus, but they did not proclaim their religious identity as "Christian." They thought of Jesus as the realization of classical Jewish hopes, however they defined them, and they thought of themselves as the true Israel or the faithful remnant of the diaspora.[7] This is no different from other Jewish sectarian writings of the period, such as the Dead Sea Scrolls. We have scores of Jewish texts from antiquity, many of which reflect a sectarian perspective, that is, a distinctive perspective on what it means to be Jewish; sometimes this perspective overlaps with other Jews' points of view, sometimes it is idiosyncratic.[8]

Significantly, one of the primary questions facing biblical scholars who concentrate on the Hellenistic and Roman periods is the difficulty of understanding how Jews, Christians, and Pagans understood their own religious identity. Paul, for example, refers to himself as a Jew both before and after his experience of the risen Jesus (see, e.g., Galatians 1: 13, 2: 15). Yet virtually all Jewish literature that was composed in Greek was preserved by Christian rather than Jewish scribes. Some of this material, such as texts from the Septuagint (the Greek translation of Hebrew scriptures) or the works of Greek-Jewish writers such as Josephus, is absolutely vital to our understanding of ancient Jewish history. Modern scholars regard this literature as Jewish. There is good evidence, though,

that the Christian scribes who preserved these texts regarded them as Christian.[9] Ironically, perhaps, the rabbis of antiquity may also have regarded them as essentially Christian, since they chose not to preserve them.[10]

The fundamental point is that religious identity in this period, and therefore the religious identity of biblical texts themselves, is a complex question. How to discriminate or identify boundaries that define religious groups is in some cases a perennial aporia, partly because religious identity in general is inherently complex and dynamic and hence hard to pin down, and partly because the boundaries between Judaism and Christianity in antiquity were much more fluid than they are today.[11] To sum up my first reason for feeling like an insider: if the religious identity of the scriptural texts themselves is open to question, especially because of the ambiguity of religious identity in the ancient period and because of the intertwined history of Judaism and Christianity, then modern Christian scholars cannot claim exclusive insider status vis-à-vis the New Testament. Both Jewish and Christian scholars would seem to be able legitimately to claim that, at least to a certain degree, all these ancient sacred texts are in some way part of their heritage.

The second way in which I think of myself as an insider relates specifically to my credentials as a New Testament scholar and the nature of the scholarly enterprise in the modern context (regardless of field). I have a PhD from a respected program in the field, and my graduate studies reflect the same kind of classical training any Christian student obtains in any reputable PhD program. I am active in several academic societies pertinent to my field. Although there are academic societies based on religious affiliation, the qualifications for most academic organizations in biblical and religious studies are based exclusively on one's scholarly credentials.[12] Moreover, my opinions are usually given serious consideration by biblical scholars of virtually every theological persuasion. I have been invited to give papers at meetings, to review books for publication, and even to publish for Christian publishing houses.

Hence I am treated as a fully enfranchised member of the field of New Testament studies. The reason for this is that the standards for inclusion are based on scholarship and scholarly credentials, not on personal religious affiliation. And whether one feels marginalized by one's scholarly guild or empowered by it, the success of one's scholarly life is at least partly determined by the respect (if not necessarily agreement) of scholarly peers. When it comes to the scholarly guild, I am an "insider." And even though there are far more Christian scholars who have expertise in New Testament texts than Jewish ones, the primary academic societies in which I hold memberships, the American Academy of Religion and the

Society of Biblical Literature, are comprised of Christians, Jews, and people of faiths or nonfaiths who read and take seriously each other's arguments and positions. Honest disagreement comes when one thinks another has not made a good argument or not offered substantial evidence for his claims. The quality of arguments is evaluated according to scholarly criteria, not on the criterion of religious affiliation.

JEWS AND THE STUDY OF PAUL

Since I do not wish to draw general conclusions about the relationship between religious identity and scholarship from my personal and professional experience alone, I would like to offer a kind of case study from my field, namely, Jewish scholarship on Paul in the last century, in order to illustrate the complexity inherent in the relationship between scholarship and religious identity.

In the late eighteenth century in Germany, a tradition of Jewish commentary on Paul began, and Jewish interpretations of Paul have increased dramatically in recent years. In what follows, I wish to relate this case study through a simplified overview, beginning with two German-Jewish figures of the early twentieth century, Leo Baeck and Martin Buber.[13] I will subsequently move to Richard Rubenstein, one of the first Jewish theologians to write about Paul in the wake of the Holocaust; then I will discuss the work of a few contemporary Jewish scholars on Paul. Discussion of the work of individual scholars will be necessarily abbreviated but sufficient, I hope, to illustrate my point. My goal is to demonstrate that whereas once Jewish identity could be more easily correlated with a particular view of Paul, that is no longer the case, even as I also recognize that the interest in Paul represented by all the scholars I discuss is driven largely by their Jewishness. But since Jewishness itself is dynamic and affected by historical circumstances (among other things), having a Jewish perspective on Paul in one context is different from under another set of circumstances. Furthermore, as Jews and Christians and others have come to work together within the same scholarly circles, views on Paul among Jews are becoming progressively more diverse. In other words, there is more diversity among Jewish scholars now than there ever has been in the past, because scholarly criteria mitigate the tendency to work with assumptions and stereotypes that might otherwise go unargued.

Jewish Views of Paul before 1950

The following words of Martin Buber encapsulate the standard view held by Jews up to at least 1950: "It is evident that Jesus, in so far as we

are able to unravel his historical reality, occupied a position within this [Pharisaic-Jewish] circle of belief. Equally obvious is the fact that Paul had turned from it when he devoted himself to the mysterium of Christ."[14]

Why was Paul the bad guy? The reason lies with the traditional reading of Paul that has prevailed through most of Western Christian history, one that was given unparalleled, paradigmatic credibility by Luther, Reformation theology, and the rise of modern biblical scholarship. According to this view, Paul, who had at one time been a Pharisee and persecutor of Christians, converted from Judaism to Christianity because of his vision of the risen Jesus. The apostle comes to represent the quintessential convert, and his letters are seen to be the ultimate expression of both the human predicament without Christ and how to achieve salvation through conversion to Christianity. Paul is understood to have rejected his Judaism, which was a legalistic religion in which one achieved salvation through the accumulation of meritorious works. Paul's embrace of Christ leads him to articulate a new religiosity, namely Christianity, a religion of grace in which one is justified not by works of the law but by faith (understood to be belief in Christ or God's saving act through Christ).[15] Furthermore, this new religiosity is seen to transcend the peculiarities not only of specific deeds but also of history and culture. Christianity is seen to be truly universal—as Paul says, "there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female" (Galatians 3:28)—while Judaism is seen to be exclusivist and elitist, ethnically particular, and requiring of its members a plethora of arcane rituals. The revelation of the risen Jesus to Paul enabled Paul to realize the futility of this system and hence to give himself over to Christ. Pressure from Jewish scholars involved in the die Wissenschaft des Judentums, as well as the increasing emphasis on the historical Jesus among Protestant biblical scholars in nineteenth-century Germany, made the recognition of the Jewishness of Jesus unavoidable.[16] But the construction of Jesus as Jew eventually resulted in an understanding of Paul's theology and mission as marking the real break with Judaism.[17]

Given my description, readers are probably not surprised to learn that Jews viewed Paul as a villain. German-Jewish theologians such as Leo Baeck (1873–1956) and Martin Buber (1878–1965) were sophisticated and broadly educated; they had colleagues and friends who were Christian, and they were informed by the scholarship of the day. Baeck and Buber wanted to offer an interpretation of Paul that would be convincing to Jews and Christians, at least to Jewish and Christian intellectuals. Unfortunately, they never transcended Jewish-Christian polemics; circumstances made it impossible.

Baeck studied Greek and Latin classics at Gymnasium, after which he attended the Jüdisch-Theologische Seminar in Breslau for rabbinical studies. Halfway through the six-year curriculum, he transferred to the Lehranstahlt für die Wissenschaft des Judentums in Berlin, a program that had been the dream of an earlier generation of German-Jewish scholars: to have a Jewish theological faculty as part of a German university. Baeck's first book was *Das Wesen des Judentums* (originally published in 1905 and translated into English as *The Essence of Judaism*), a book written in response to Adolf von Harnack's *Das Wesen des Christentums* (originally published in 1901 and translated into English as *What Is Christianity?*), who, in his attempt to define the essence of Christianity, especially as distinct from Judaism, had revealed his ignorance of Judaism.[18] Baeck devoted most of his publishing to understanding the relation between Judaism and Christianity.

Buber was given a solid Jewish education as a youth, but did not engage in formal rabbinical studies. Rather, he pursued his doctorate in philosophy (one of his teachers was Wilhelm Dilthey), though he became widely known as a Jewish theologian through his publications. He was an adjunct professor of religious history and ethics at Frankfurt-am-Main between 1930 and 1933, until he was ousted by the Nazis. He became involved in the Zionist movement and eventually emigrated to Palestine in 1938.[19]

Also in 1938, in Germany, Baeck published a revised form of his essay entitled "Romantic Religion."[20] Although Baeck saw strains of Judaism in Paul's writings, he characterized Paul as one who had left his Judaism and became a "romantic" ("Romantic Religion," 65). Baeck had a resoundingly negative view of Romanticism. He said there were essentially two types of religion: one classical, one romantic; Judaism corresponded to the former; Lutheran Christianity, or what he called "Pauline religion," corresponded to the latter ("Romantic Religion," 64). In Pauline religion, according to Baeck, emphasis on an otherworldly reality completely supersedes earthly reality, leaving everyday life devoid of any spiritual meaning. Baeck reasoned that Romantic religion lacks the ethical component characteristic of classical religion and thereby causes the adherents of such religiosity to become utterly passive:

> The salvation that comes through faith is in no sense earned, but wholly received. . . . God effects it, as Luther later explained the words of Paul, "in us and without us." Man is no more than the mere object of God's activity, of grace or damnation; he does not recognize God, God merely recognizes him; he *becomes* a child of redemption or destruction, "forced into disobedience" or raised up to salvation. He is the object of virtue and of sin—not its producer, its subject. One feels like saying: man does not live

> but is lived, and what remains to him is merely, to speak with Schleiermacher, the "taste of infinity," that is, the living experience; the mood and the emotional relation of one who knows himself to be wholly an object; the feeling of faith in which grace is present or the feeling of unbelief in which sin prevails. ("Romantic Religion," 66–67)

In *Two Types of Faith*—purportedly written in Palestine in 1948 while the League of Arab Nations laid siege to the newly created state of Israel[21]—Buber, like Baeck, argued that Judaism and Christianity represented two entirely different forms of religion, even if they were historically intertwined. But Buber did not explain the difference by appeal to Romanticism. Rather, he believed that the beginning of Paul's falling away from Judaism, or what Buber considered to be essential to Judaism, starts before his conversion to Christ. It starts with the influence of Hellenism. "The Hellenistic Judaism of common coinage, as we know it for instance from the statements of Josephus on his mode of thinking, an eclecticism from an attenuated Biblical tradition and a not less attenuated Stoic philosophy, is satisfied to associate God with a power of fate, which causes the suffering of the righteous."[22]

Buber is not the first person to articulate the influence of Hellenism on Judaism before the time of Paul; he takes this idea from Protestant biblical scholars. But Buber articulates the significance of Hellenism in a way diametrically opposed to his Christian contemporaries. Buber highlights the Hellenistic notion of fate because, as he explains, the notion of fate—previously foreign to Judaism—helped to explain the seemingly interminable suffering Israel had endured for centuries, which seemed to have reached an unbearable level under Roman occupation. Such a situation caused some Hellenized Jews, like Paul, to develop the sense of a huge "abyss," as Buber calls it, "full of wrath." In the words of Paul, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth" (Romans 1:18). According to Buber, while Israel had previously enjoyed the love and protection of a God who had created human beings in God's own image and hence had no need of reconciliation, now there was enmity between humans and God. For Paul and other Hellenistic Jewish writers, the fusion of Hellenistic fate with the Jewish belief in God created an enormous chasm between human beings and God and, thereby, a need for reconciliation.[23] Since humans were understood to be hopelessly under the power of fate, however, they can do nothing to effect reconciliation themselves; salvation from this world must be initiated by God by some magnificent event of apocalyptic proportion. For Paul, this event is the death

of God's Son. Such is Buber's etiology of Paul's "justification by faith." Hence Buber accepts the significance of Hellenism for understanding Paul and Christian origins, but he views it as a theological malformation from Judaism.

Ironically, Buber and Baeck do not really offer a Jewish reading of Paul. Theologically speaking, they take the typical German Protestant understanding of Paul for granted; they simply articulate the mirror image of that interpretation. Buber and Baeck believe that Paul left his Judaism behind (even if they have different explanations of how and why it happened); they see him as a Christian and hence they do not provide any innovative insights into Paul in spite of their Jewish perspective. The only "Jewish" perspective is in their *valuation* of Paul's Christian religiosity, not their interpretation of Paul himself. For Luther and German Protestants who followed in his interpretive path, Paul's theology represents the pinnacle of human religiosity; for Buber and Baeck it is the nadir. Buber and Baeck use Paul as a lens to critique Christianity, which they view as an eviscerated religion in which adherents become hopelessly passive and incapable of living ethical lives. Given the circumstances in which Buber and Baeck lived, their views are not terribly surprising.

Jewish Views of Paul after 1950

Richard Rubenstein, who first became famous for his book, *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism* (which was largely the construction of a Jewish theology and identity not just in the wake of the Holocaust but also, like Buber and Baeck, in distinction from Protestant Christianity), wrote another book a few years later, *My Brother Paul*, in which he summed up the past century of Jewish scholarship on Paul in the memorable phrase, "Jesus, yes; Paul, never!"[24] Like his predecessors, he wanted to offer a Jewish interpretation of Paul, but unlike them, he rejected their negative assessment of Paul, which placed the apostle outside the history of Judaism: "Paul was a Jewish messianist, not an anti-Semite" (*My Brother Paul*, 115). Rubenstein succeeds in articulating a vision of Paul that deviates significantly from his predecessors:

> It seems to me that the issues to which Paul addressed himself arose entirely within the religious and symbolic universe of the Judaism of his time and that he never ceased to regard himself as a believing, faithful Jew rather than as an apostate. The fundamental issues dividing Paul from the Pharisees were the question of whether Jesus was in fact Israel's Messiah and whether his Resurrection had ushered in that period known as the "Days of the Messiah." (*My Brother Paul*, 114–115)

In spite of his break with the traditional Jewish reading of Paul, Rubenstein's understanding of the apostle is not original. Rather, Rubenstein articulated for a broader audience the beginnings of a paradigm shift that was percolating among Christian scholars in the wake of the Holocaust and important advances in our understanding of ancient Judaism.[25] By his own acknowledgment, the work of scholars such as Johannes Munck, W. D. Davies, and Krister Stendahl, all of whom would later be recognized as scholars who helped to initiate a paradigm shift in Pauline studies, was foundational to Rubenstein's view of Paul.[26] Like Buber and Baeck, Rubenstein reflects the Christian New Testament scholarship of his day. His understanding of Paul does not derive from a distinctly Jewish perspective; rather, he lends a Jewish voice to an existing Christian perspective.

The paradigm shift that was just beginning when Rubenstein wrote is now commonly called the *new perspective* on Paul. Stendahl was one of the key biblical scholars who inaugurated the new perspective on Paul. He argued that Paul never underwent a conversion. Rather, Paul experienced a "call," analogous to the prophets of the Hebrew Bible, in which God issues a call for repentance through a messenger, except that Paul was sent out to speak to the Gentiles instead of the people of Israel, as most of the classical prophets were.[27] Also, in a famous essay entitled "Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," Stendahl deliberately argued against the traditional reading that had been in place since Luther.[28] The reigning Protestant view of Paul was that the apostle realized the futility of law as a means to salvation because of his own biographical experience of not being able to live up to it while he was a Jew, and thus he came to see the need for Christ. Stendahl argued that this reading of Paul comes from modernist conceptions of introspection, of which Luther was one of the pioneers because of his preoccupation with his own sinfulness. The doctrine of justification by faith that Luther found in Paul was a kind of salvation for Luther; he was saved from his guilty conscience. But, as Stendahl so convincingly demonstrated to many scholars, Paul never had a guilty conscience—Paul calls himself "blameless as to the law" (Philippians 3:6). Paul's focus on justification by faith derived not from the need for personal forgiveness but from the need to resolve the problem of Jews and Gentiles. Justification by faith, as well as Paul's emphasis on grace, according to Stendahl, was intended as a way to overcome the problem of the separation of Jew and Gentile.[29]

Most new-perspective scholars have accepted Stendahl's basic analysis; they do not believe Paul converted and thereby rejected his Judaism. Nor do they think Paul made a wholesale rejection of Judaism

and Jewish law; he simply did not want to impose it on Gentiles. Yet Paul believed that the covenant that Israel had enjoyed was now going to be extended to Gentiles through Christ. Paul's vitriolic statements about the law are now understood not to refer necessarily to Jewish law in general and to the Jews who observe it, but rather to Judaizers, that is, other believers in Jesus (whether Jewish or Gentile) who believe that Gentiles need to observe Mosaic law in order to share in the covenant.

Of course, not all Pauline scholars are new-perspective scholars; many have defended the traditional reading, and some have done so in light of the new-perspective critique and might be regarded as neo-traditionalists. Furthermore, some new-perspective scholars are much more radical than others. In other words, scholarship on Paul has become more diverse, offering more interpretive options. Not surprisingly, Jewish scholars, too, have become gradually more varied in their understanding of Paul.

In 1990, the Jewish scholar Alan Segal wrote a book entitled *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee.*[30] As should be evident from the title, the book argued against Stendahl and others who had followed in his interpretive path. Harkening back to the traditional view but with interesting new twists, Segal argued that Paul in fact had a conversion experience but that this conversion was not from Judaism to Christianity but "from one variety of Judaism to another. Paul's letters record the thinking of a Pharisee who has converted to a new, apocalyptic, mystical, and—to many of his contemporaries—suspiciously heretical form of Judaism."[31] Like all of his predecessors, Segal self-consciously writes as a Jew, but he articulates a new scholarly agenda out of that perspective: he believes Paul should be studied as part of Jewish history.

Using modern theory from the social sciences about conversion, Segal argues that conversion is not an instantaneous event but a process. The traces of that process can be found in Paul's writings. Because Segal thinks of Paul as a convert, even in this more nuanced sense, he essentially rejects the new perspective on Paul. Hence he understands Paul's negative statements about Torah and Judaism to be general rejections of that form of religiosity and he explains such statements as typical of how converts speak about their former lives. He explains Paul's positive statements about Torah and Judaism as remnants of the apostle's former Pharisaic self. Many aspects of converts' experiences indicate continuity between their preconversion and postconversion lives, even if the convert is not aware of it.

A few years later, Daniel Boyarin wrote a very different book on Paul, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity*, but he named as his first

motivation for writing the book the same motivation Segal named: "First of all, I would like to reclaim Pauline studies as an important, even integral part of the study of Judaism in the Roman period and late antiquity."[32] But he then named a second motivation that is ultimately more important for him: "I would like to reclaim Paul as an important Jewish thinker." He goes on: "Assuming, as I do, that Paul was motivated not by an abnormal psychological state but by a set of problems and ideas generated by his cultural, religious situation, I read him as a Jewish cultural critic, and I ask what it was in Jewish culture that led him to produce a discourse of radical reform of that culture" (*Radical Jew*, 2).

On the one hand, Boyarin is, unlike Segal, a new-perspective scholar: "On my reading of the Pauline corpus, Paul lived and died convinced that he was a Jew living out Judaism" (*Radical Jew*, 2). Paradoxically, however, Boyarin explains much of Paul's perspective as being more Hellenistic than Jewish:

> Paul was motivated by a Hellenistic desire for the One, which among other things produced an ideal of a universal human essence, beyond difference and hierarchy. This universal human humanity, however, was predicated (and still is) on the dualism of flesh and spirit, such that while the body is particular, marked through practice as Jew or Greek, and through anatomy as male or female, the spirit is universal. (*Radical Jew*, 7)

By using the expression "Hellenistic desire for the One," Boyarin harkens back to assumptions associated more with the traditional reading of Paul as well as Buber's emphasis on Hellenism. But Boyarin's agenda is even bigger than Buber's defense of Judaism and critique of Christianity. Like many Christian scholars, Boyarin associates universalism with Hellenism and Pauline Christianity and, complementarily, associates particularity with Pharisaic and rabbinic Judaism. But Boyarin believes Paul was "deeply flawed" as a social thinker (*Radical Jew*, 9) because he not only compromised the distinctiveness of Judaism but compromised tolerance for human difference in the subsequent history of Western culture.

The last Jewish writer on Paul I will mention is Mark Nanos and his book, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter*.[33] Nanos takes new-perspective scholars, whether Jewish or Christian, to task for not following through with the working assumptions of the new paradigm. Although they say they take Paul's continuing first-century Jewish identity seriously in reading Paul, new-perspective scholars still see more discontinuity than continuity between Paul and Judaism. "Paul is regarded implicitly, often explicitly, as an apostate:

Paul no longer believed the practice of Torah or Jewish halakhah were meaningful expressions of faith" (*Mystery*, 5).

In marked distinction to virtually every other Jewish interpreter before him, Nanos presents Paul as thoroughly and completely Jewish. Nanos believes that "the Paul behind the text of Romans is a practicing Jew—'a good Jew'—albeit a Jew shaped by his conviction in Jesus as Israel's Christ, who did not break with the essential truths of the Judaism(s) of his day, who was committed to the restoration of his people as his first and foremost responsibility in the tradition of Israel's Deuteronomic prophets" (*Mystery*, 9). For Nanos, not only did Paul maintain his Jewish identity after he came to believe in Jesus, but he continued to be an observant Jew! Nanos' reading of Paul is so "Jewish" that it pushes the boundaries of the new perspective.

A small number of Christian scholars have, like Nanos, carried the new perspective to what they see as its ultimate conclusions. A particularly poignant example is John Gager, whose recent book, *Reinventing Paul*, is a passionate plea to read Paul as uncompromisingly Jewish. Gager says that he is not affiliated with any religious institution but is Christian only in a broad sense. Nevertheless, he articulates motivations for his work that come out of his religious identity:

> I believe that our history, or rather what we think and know of it, does matter in the present. I would not claim that Paul, or even Christianity as a whole, is responsible for modern anti-Semitism. But Paul in the traditional reading has been an important part of that story. If that version should turn out to be wrong, the story will need to be revised. "[M]uch is at stake here. Jews cannot view with much sympathy a Christianity that adheres to the teaching of contempt for the Torah of Moses." Conversely, from a Christian perspective, "a Christian church with an anti-semitic New Testament is abominable."[34]

RETROSPECTIVE SUMMARY

In Pauline scholarship presently, the dividing line between those who emphasize the continuity with Judaism in Paul's letters and those who see more discontinuity does not correlate with religious affiliation. But to divide scholars into two binary camps or ways of reading Paul is a gross oversimplification in any case. While Segal, Boyarin, and Nanos all acknowledge their Jewish perspective, claim Paul as a legitimate subject within Jewish history, and see the study of Paul as pertinent to understanding modern Jewish-Christian relations, they approach Paul very differently and, like all biblical scholars, would disagree on the meaning of particular words, phrases, and verses. In other words, *there is no essential Jewish perspective on Paul*, if by Jewish we mean a dominant

perspective on Paul, developed, articulated, and widely shared by Jewish scholars. The new perspective on Paul, particularly the new perspective that reads Paul as consistently and thoroughly Jewish, as is represented in the work of Nanos and Gager, is a scholarly stance, not a confessional one.

I have juxtaposed the work of Buber and Baeck with later scholars in order to demonstrate that Jewish identity itself means different things at different times and in different cultural contexts. Buber and Baeck were German Jews whose views were greatly influenced by the social and intellectual context of Germany in the first half of the twentieth century. In other words, they were not just Jews, they were also Germans, and they witnessed within their lifetimes the worst anti-Semitic event in history. Their social reality virtually necessitated apologetics. Their "interpretations" of Paul are not really about Paul at all; he is merely the foil for articulating the essential difference between Judaism and Christianity in a desperate attempt to reveal the flaws of Christianity and highlight the virtues of Judaism. For Buber and Baeck, just as for their Christian contemporaries, Paul is the quintessential Christian.

Rubenstein, Segal, Boyarin, and Nanos are all American Jews living at a different point in history. Like Buber and Baeck, they are influenced by their Christian contemporaries; most importantly, they are influenced by the new perspective on Paul, even though they respond to it critically, sometimes rejecting it (Segal), sometimes saying it does not go far enough (Nanos). But as American Jews, they live in a very different context from Buber and Baeck; they are not under immediate threat of persecution for being Jewish, and many of their Christian colleagues have developed a profound appreciation for Judaism. Not only has reflection on the Holocaust spawned passionate interest in Jewish-Christian relations, Jewish scholars now work side by side with Christian scholars. They belong to many of the same academic societies, go to the same meetings, and produce publications together. Judaic studies departments are commonplace in academe. It is no coincidence that the new perspective on Paul began to emerge in the 1960s and took off in the seventies and eighties. As one can see in the quote from Gager, the motivation to read Paul "Jewishly" comes from an awareness of living in a post-Holocaust world, not from *being* Jewish; sometimes this awareness is explicit, sometimes not, but it is a motivating factor for many Jewish and Christian scholars. Nevertheless, this post-Holocaust perspective has not produced predetermined results concerning the status of Paul's religious identity.

The essential difference between the pre-1950s Jewish scholars and those who came after them is the diversity of perspective of the latter, which comes as a welcome development.[35] Although they were scholars in the sense that they articulated reasons for their perspectives on Paul, Buber and Baeck were mainly apologists for Judaism, less interested in Paul himself than in desperately trying to make their Christian contemporaries acknowledge the validity of Judaism. Some might argue that the diversity of perspective seen among Rubenstein, Segal, Boyarin, and Nanos is due to the different brands of Judaism they represent. While I think their individual orientations toward Judaism probably influence them in some way or other, the recognition that there can be multiple perspectives among Jewish scholars only bolsters my argument that there is no single Jewish perspective and therefore that religious identity does not determine one's scholarly judgment in any predictable way.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

There is no evidence that simply being Jewish has made anyone better or worse at interpreting Paul. Therefore I cannot see how being Jewish entitles me to any a priori scholarly privilege or, alternatively, burdens me with a handicap. At the same time, I think my religious identity, along with various other aspects of my identity, plays a significant role in my academic work, particularly in how it motivates me to set my scholarly agenda. Although I have not spoken here of my own work on Paul, I have no doubt that I am motivated to do it at least partly because I care deeply about modern Jewish-Christian relations in the wake of the Holocaust.[36] How Christians think about Paul affects how they think about Judaism, so my emphasis on Paul is admittedly no coincidence.

At the same time, there are Christians who have the same motivation in their study of Paul, so a self-consciousness about living in a post-Holocaust world is not a uniquely Jewish perspective. The constituent parts of my identity that have most informed my work do not coincide with simple fixed formulations or labels (e.g., being Jewish) but rather are due to the convergence of various aspects of identity (religious, ethnic, educational, psychological, historical, etc.), which cannot be reduced to a simple formula for determining my views about Paul.[37] My concern for healthy Jewish-Christian relations does not predetermine or privilege what I say about Paul. I suspect that identity may more often be correlated with the *choice* of subject matter, or at least the kinds of questions asked, than in predicting the *results* of scholarly inquiry based on the scholar's personal identity.

But the motivation to pursue certain kinds of scholarly study should not be confused or equated with the scholarly product that has resulted from those scholarly pursuits.

Although I do not have space to make my case here, I believe that the radical Jewish reading of Paul is the most compelling of the various interpretive options.[38] But the case for this reading of Paul must be made on scholarly grounds; that is the only way it can be broadly persuasive. As Bruce Lincoln has argued, academic credibility depends on "the footnotes," that is, the evidence one presents in support of a position, which is "subject to the scrutiny and criticism of others."[39] A perspective grounded in a particular religious or historical identity certainly has the potential to make an important scholarly contribution, but that potential can be realized only in argumentation and validated by the footnotes and all that footnotes imply.[40] Scholars who claim religion as their field of study are as bound by the canons of scholarship as scholars in any other field. I recognize that some canons may apply to one discipline and not another, because some methods are appropriate only to certain fields of study. But at the very least, scholarship is predicated on the relentless pursuit of inquiry. Hence if any particular perspective is assumed either to be inherently flawed or inherently advantaged, critical inquiry is foreshortened and the activity of scholarship is compromised. Scholarship may not always produce satisfactory answers, but it seems to me to be obliged to foster an indefatigable spirit of questioning in which all scholars participate as both subject and object.

NOTES

1. These were some of the questions originally put to the contributors by the editors of this volume in a proposal that led first to a conference and then to this volume.
2. The theoretical perspective with which I begin is explicated more thoroughly in the essay by Cabezón in this volume.
3. I use the term "Jewishness" rather than "Judaism" in order to highlight that there is no essential, nonchanging way to be Jewish; cf. the comments of S. Cohen about the elusiveness of defining Jewish identity in antiquity in *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California, 1999), 1–139.
4. I have found the essays in the volume, *Teaching What You're Not: Identity Politics in Higher Education*, ed. K. J. Mayberry (New York: New York University, 1997), to be helpful; various scholars in various fields recount their experiences of teaching what they're not. In regard to being challenged by students or public audiences, cf. experiences reported by J. Jones, "Teaching what the Truth Compels You to Teach: A Historian's View," 177–178.
5. Occasionally Jews (or other non-Christians) attend Iliff, but comparatively few.
6. See the comments of Cho in this volume, as well as those of Cabezón.
7. Cf., for example, the opening of 1 Peter: "To the exiles of the diaspora in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, chosen according to the foreknowledge of

God the Father by the sanctification of the spirit, for the purpose of obedience and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" (translation mine). Although the appearance of "Jesus Christ" causes many immediately to identify this text as Christian, concepts such as being in exile in the "diaspora" and sanctification through the sprinkling of blood (see Exodus 24:8) are common "Jewish" theological ideas of the day. See also 1 Peter 1:16–17; 2:4–10; Romans 9: 6–8; 11:27.

8. Many examples could be invoked to illustrate this point. Pharisees and followers of Jesus both believed fervently in resurrection, while Sadducees did not. Both Essenes (another sect of Jews, believed by many scholars to have produced the Dead Sea Scrolls) and Christians had hostile things to say about the Jerusalem Temple, which they believed was served by a corrupt priesthood. One of the biggest questions facing Jews of every kind in the Hellenistic and Roman periods was the question of relations with Gentiles. The Apostle Paul, for example, seemed to have valued developing relations with Gentiles and transcending traditional barriers. Josephus, a Jewish historian and contemporary of Paul's, wrote his famous work, *The Jewish War*, in order to reestablish Jewish-Roman equilibrium and persuade the Romans that Jews were good members of the empire after the brutal war with Rome in which the Romans destroyed the Temple (66–70 CE).
9. Although Josephus seems not to have taken notice of Jesus, there is at least one text, commonly known as the *Testimonium Flavianum*, which scholars widely regard as an interpolation by Christian scribes (or at least a partially interpolated text), in which Josephus speaks reverently of Jesus (*Jewish Antiquities* 18.3.3 §63). Not only were the works of Philo, a Jewish philosopher in Alexandria in the first century, preserved by Christian scribes, but his writings were so revered and influential on Christian theology that Christian writers by the third century had come to think of him as a virtual Christian (see, e.g., Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 2.16–17). For more on the reception of Philo by Christians, see D. R. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature: A Survey* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).
10. I will offer only one illustration of the irony of the Christian preservation of Jewish texts: the historical events that led to the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah are recounted in the first and second books of Maccabees, written in the second century BCE. The books of Maccabees can be found only in Catholic or Orthodox Bibles or in the collection of writings Protestants call the Apocrypha. These books were not preserved by the rabbis or by any other Jews. Hence Jews celebrate the holiday, but Christian scribes preserved the story as part of their Bible. Does this make 1 & 2 Maccabees a Jewish or Christian text?
11. Cf. the comments of C. Farnham, who argues that racial identity is far more complicated and slippery than most Americans are willing to acknowledge, in "The Discipline of History and the Demands of Identity Politics" in Mayberry, *Teaching What You're Not*, 107–112.
12. For example, the Catholic Biblical Association (CBA) was originally set up for Catholic scholars. Although its Web site states that the mission of the CBA is to promote the scholarly study of scripture "within the context of faith," the criteria for membership are based on academic credentials (along with nomination from an existing member), and many of their members are non-Catholics (http://cba.cua.edu./default.cfm). Furthermore, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, the journal sponsored by the CBA, accepts articles from scholars of any religious orientation (or nonorientation); scholarly quality is the only criterion for inclusion. Similarly, membership in the Association for Jewish Studies does not depend on religious affiliation. As stated on its Web site, anyone may be a member "whose full-time vocation is devoted to either teaching or research in academic Jewish Studies or related endeavors. . . ." (http: //www.brandeis.edu/ajs/).

13. For a nearly exhaustive treatment of the history of Jewish commentators on Paul since the eighteenth century, especially German-Jewish commentators, see S. Meissner, *Die Heimholung des Ketzers: Studien zur jüdischen Auseinandersetzung mit Paulus* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1996).
14. M. Buber, *Two Types of Faith* (New York, Macmillan Publishing Company, 1951), 137.
15. The understanding of Judaism as the antithesis of Christianity was frequently used as a cypher for Protestant-Catholic dispute. Hence many of the diatribes about the failures of Judaism found in the writings of Protestant scholars are disguised diatribes against the Roman Church and the Papacy. One of the best discussions of this phenomenon can be found in G. F. Moore, "Christian Writers on Judaism," *Harvard Theological Review* 14 (1921): 197–254.
16. Die Wissenshaft des Judentums is usually translated literally as "the scientific study of Judaism," but is perhaps best translated "the academic study of Judaism." It refers to the movement started by Leopold Zunz and others in mid-nineteenth century Germany. Members of the Verein für Cultur and Wissenschoft der Juden (Society for the Culture and Academic Study of Judaism) were motivated partly by a desire to legitimate Judaism in the eyes of non-Jews.
17. An excellent discussion of the central role played by Abraham Geiger—a major figure of die Wissenschaft des Judentums—in developing the construction of Jesus the Jew and the theological and political fallout that resulted between Jews and Christians (and, significantly, *among* Jews and Christians of different leanings) can be found in S. Heschel, *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). See especially her discussion of F. C. Bauer and other members of the Tübingen school, who attempted—with some difficulty—to integrate the study of Paul and Pauline Christianity into a historical affirmation of the Jewish orientation of Jesus and his followers (106–122).
18. The English edition of Baeck's work consulted for this essay is *The Essence of Judaism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1948). According to Heschel, Harnack's *Das Wesen des Christentums* was itself a response to the writings of Abraham Geiger; see *Abraham Geiger*, 9–10.
19. By contrast, Baeck stayed in Europe during the Nazi era. Amazingly, he managed to survive Theresienstadt.
20. The essay was originally published in 1922 as "Romantische Religion. Ein erster Abschnitt aus einem Werke über Klassische u. romantische Religion," in *Festschrift zum 50 jährigen Bestehen der Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Berlin, 1922), 1–48. The English edition used for this essay is "Romantic Religion," in *Jewish Perspectives on Christianity*, ed. F. Rothschild (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 59–91; hereafter cited in text as "Romantic Religion."
21. See E. Stegemann, "Introduction to Martin Buber," in *Jewish Perspectives on Christianity*, 111–121, esp. 119.
22. Buber, *Two Types of Faith*, 145.
23. In addition to Josephus, Buber gives the example of the Apocalypse of Ezra, which is also usually dated to the first century CE; see *Two Types of Faith*, 146–147.
24. R. Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1966); *My Brother Paul* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972); hereafter cited as *My Brother Paul.*
25. For example, the publication of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which began in the 1950s, helped to contextualize the vituperative language found in Paul's letters (and other New Testament texts). The Dead Sea Scrolls gave further evidence of the severity of sectarianism of the time and how vicious Jewish groups could be in opposition to one another.
26. In the preface to *My Brother Paul*, for example, Rubenstein recognizes the influence of Stendahl in particular: "I want to express my gratitude to Dean Krister Stendahl of

Harvard Divinity School for encouraging me to undertake this endeavor and for offering a number of suggestions that aided me in rethinking my original position on Paul" (ix).

27. See Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1976), 7–23. Stendahl based his argument for the call of Paul primarily on Galatians 1:15–16: "But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles."
28. Citations for this essay are taken from Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*, 78–96. The essay was originally published in English in *Harvard Theological Review* 56 (1963): 199–215.
29. Stendahl, *Paul*, 23–40.
30. A. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).
31. Segal, *Paul the Convert*, xii. For a contrasting, new-perspective take on Paul's "conversion," see J. Gager, "Some Notes on Paul's Conversion," *New Testament Studies* 27 (1981): 697–704.
32. D. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California, 1994), 1; hereafter cited in text as *Radical Jew*.
33. M. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996); hereafter cited as *Mystery*.
34. J. Gager, *Reinventing Paul* (New York: Oxford, 2001), 18. The first quotation in the citation from Gager comes from M. Wyschogrod, "A Jewish View of Christianity," in *Toward a Theological Encounter: Jewish Understandings of Christianity*, ed. L. Klenicki (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 119. The second is from another radical new-perspective scholar, L. Gaston, *Paul and the Torah* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1987), 15.
35. Cf. the concluding section of Davaney's essay in this volume, in which she proposes four "commitments" of scholarship, one of which is "the commitment to the proliferation of perspectives." The engagement of diverse perspectives seems to me a necessity if we are to correct for unreflective ideological givens.
36. The two articles where I discuss Paul's Jewish identity and contextualize my perspective within the arena of scholarly discourse are P. Eisenbaum, "Is Paul the Father of Misogyny and Antisemitism?" *CrossCurrents* 50 (4): 506–524; and "Paul as the New Abraham," in *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, and Interpretation,* ed. R. Horsley (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 130–145.
37. See Eisenbaum, "Misogyny and Antisemitism," 506–508, for an example of the way in which I acknowledge how certain constituent parts of my personal identity inform my reading of Paul's letters.
38. I do, however, disagree with Nanos, Gager, and many others on various interpretive details. This is not to say that I am any more idiosyncratic than any other scholar. Rather, it further demonstrates that the diversity of perspectives on Paul continues to proliferate precisely because there now exists more freedom from the constraints of personal identity, and, in my view, the proliferation of perspectives enriches and deepens our understanding of Paul and Pauline Christianity.
39. B. Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology and Scholarship* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999), 208. Lincoln devotes the epilogue of *Theorizing Myth* to extolling the virtue of footnotes as the distinguishing mark of scholarship.
40. Lincoln sums up the significance of footnotes nicely: "Ideally, footnotes mark the fact that a scholarly text is not a discourse of free invention, wherein ideological interests escape all controls. Rather, they serve as a visible reminder that scholarly texts result from a dialectic encounter between an interested inquirer, a body of evidence, and a community of other competent and interested researchers, past, present, and future"; *Theorizing Myth*, 208.

5

NEITHER HERE NOR THERE: CROSSING BOUNDARIES, BECOMING INSIDERS, REMAINING CATHOLIC

Francis X. Clooney, S.J.

I

I was born and grew up Roman Catholic, went to Catholic schools, and entered the seminary just after my eighteenth birthday. As part of my training, I studied philosophy and theology in a Jesuit university and Jesuit divinity school. During these years, professors and religious guides inculcated high intellectual and practical expectations regarding the Catholic intellectual life, theology included: intelligence, critical reading and reasoning, taking seriously faith and what we learn by study, allowing the implications of our study to influence how we live our lives. Presented to us in an ideal form, theologizing moves from what people said about God to knowledge of God and then to encounter with God. Good theology opens into prayer as personal practice and as a communal shared enterprise. Although this theology is itself a mode of religious practice, the path to wisdom, a kind of *sādhana*, being a Catholic theologian is not a privileged role possible only for a chosen few. Or, more directly, one might say that the chosen few are those who have not only been chosen but who have more basically chosen to involve themselves deeply and centrally in the Christian community in this manner.

Early on, Augustine's definition of theology as "faith seeking understanding" became my working definition as well. We were urged to admire St. Anselm, whose reflection on the existence of God in the

Proslogion was framed in terms of prayer. For academic and spiritual reasons, we empathized with St. Thomas Aquinas, who seems to have decided on his deathbed that his theology was nothing compared to the reality of God encountered more directly in the face of death. Theology was to be faithful thinking in the service of the life of faith. Like other intellectual disciplines, theology involved a good deal of solitary work; but we were also constantly reminded that theology is a communal activity, and we were never to devise a system simply to suit ourselves or simply according to modern academic standards. Since theology did overflow into practice and was conceived of as rooted in faith, its implications were not only intellectual but also to be tested in worship, catechesis, and in accord with Church teachings. Theologians were to remain closely involved in the community of Catholic believers, and their faith and traditions set some limits on speculation; as would, of course, the hierarchical authorities of the Church.

While most Christians are in fact born into Christian families, converts are welcome, and no one rightly asserts that converts are not fully insiders to the Christian tradition. It is essential to the Christian faith that outsiders can become insiders; indeed, in the rhetoric of the Church the convert is the paradigmatic Christian. Certainly, then, one can become a theologian too. This combination of faith, learning, and insight did not require that one have by birth some privileged insider identity. Since there was no incentive of money or prestige and power (except perhaps in a narrow, increasingly unattractive clerical context), one needed to have some personal yet also communal reason for wanting to be a theologian. Thereafter, though, it was simply a matter of study, teaching, writing, and all these as tasks taken up within the community of the Church. By practice over time, a novice theologian becomes adept at seeing the world in a particular way and according to distinctive values, and thereafter lives accordingly. It might take years to become an accomplished theologian, but—like other career choices imagined in upwardly mobile baby-boom America—anyone who really wanted to could do so.

Whatever we learned and wrote had to be translatable—even if by other layers of explanation, possibly in simpler and simpler texts—into terms that the ordinary believer could acknowledge. To be a theologian was to have a socially articulate, responsive, and interactive identity and role. A scholar of Christian studies working entirely on her or his own, or only with academic colleagues as if in a discipline not accountable to the Christian community, might well be a respected intellectual whose brilliance might outshine an ecclesiastically committed theologian, but without meriting the title "theologian." Accordingly, theological writings always opened up interesting intellectual and religious possibilities.

Theology was also presented to us as a moment in the process of encountering God. Religious truth is objective, even if received according to the capacities of the subject; the major Reality to be known is God, who does really exist and who is knowable in some reliable (even if imperfect) fashion in the Bible and traditions of the Church. This God can to some extent be known in nature and by reason. God is really involved in the world around us, a God who makes himself (as it is usually put) known. God does not have elite standards. In that sense, theology is objective, scientific, and public, marked at the deepest level by the expectation of a transition from knowledge about religion and God to a more personal and intimate knowledge of God, in real even if mediated encounter. What we know and say is subjective in all sorts of ways, but in the end it is truth that is grasped, not just ourselves or our constructions of reality. Even when theology becomes elite due to advanced learning, by the demands of practice, or by its inevitable entombment in clerical and academic conformity, it remains in essence fundamentally open to all, since its Object is by definition available to all, for all. So too, this theology presumed that there is something we can term "nature" and even "human nature" lying deeper than cultural and linguistic differences. Theology could therefore be reasonably portrayed by my teachers as balanced on the edge between the world of a religious community, albeit one as large and complex as the Roman Catholic Church, and the world of the modern university, where knowledge of reality might be imagined to be the goal. The reasonable person hence understands in a way that should cross religious boundaries. There is no person or community or culture so alien as to be entirely inaccessible or entirely beyond the realm of what we can talk about in intelligible terms.

This understanding of theology has stayed with me and guided my intellectual journey in a fundamental fashion, even if key aspects of how we study and teach theology as a university discipline have changed in past decades. Details change, but even now this account of theology provides for me a bridge between traditions and a confidence that the deeper and more elusive theoretical and practical values of other communities could become accessible to the attentive reader. If I could be a Christian theologian, I felt too that I could learn to think theologically according to the insights of another religious tradition, as a kind of imperfectly formed insider to that tradition.[1]

II

Theology involves the whole person in an ultimately all-encompassing way of religious living, thinking, and writing. Being a faithful Christian

deems possible and expects a willingness to become—to choose to become—an intelligent and engaged insider to this tradition, as one gains privileged insights and wisdom regarding efficacious ways of living and understanding this life. From a Christian perspective, moreover, anyone can become an insider to our tradition and begin to theologize for the Christian community. Over the years, I have presupposed that there is nothing uniquely Christian about this balance of theory and practice, faith and reason, the demands of lonely thinking and the demands of community, the accessibility of insider status and the possibility of becoming a theologian. But if people born and raised in other traditions can become insiders to the Christian tradition, why not then imagine that persons not born Muslim or Hindu or Buddhist can become at home in those traditions too, understanding and sharing their theological enterprise?

Thinkers in other faith traditions have similarly investigated and practiced their faith, whether or not the word "theology" is used. While traditions have their own logic and set their own boundaries—such as cannot be casually crossed by individuals at their own choosing—nonetheless, even exclusivist theological self-representations of theologies were proposed as reasonable and legible—and thus as potentially open to discussion in a public realm; no good reason has arisen to justify assuming that "theology" differed radically from tradition to tradition. This belief on my part may have been a mistake, since the notions of insider/outsider and degrees of participation play out differently in different traditions; but it has been a fruitful (mis)apprehension that has shaped my work over the years.

If traditions possess theologies, and thus bring together faith and reason, words and practice, insider discourse and claims about the Real, then just as conversion to a new tradition is possible, learning one's way into a new tradition is possible. The path of learning and participation marks a gradual ascent, as we proceed from reading to understanding words, ideas, and contexts, to participating in cherished practices, to sharing deeper faith commitments, to encounters with the divine as it is articulated in a particular tradition, my own or another. Though in many ways still outside the other tradition, one becomes enough of an insider that the tradition's realities work powerfully and invite assent. The theologian is captivated, in a way analogous to how she or he might experience religious truths and realities in her or his home tradition.

My own path through reading and understanding to insider status is probably most clear with regard to my study of Śrīvaiṣṇavism, when I spent several years studying the 100 songs and 1102 verses of the *Tiruvāymoḻi*, composed by Śaṭakōpaṉ in the ninth century. It is a

devotional work dedicated to Viṣṇu and his consort Śrī Lakṣmī, worshipped from a variety of angles, including in their presence in the world in the form of avatāras. The verses are lovely, intelligent, inviting, commanding; they draw in the reader, entice the scholar, and illumine how we might simply live our lives in accord with the vision of the world they incorporate. Though linguistically difficult at times, the commentaries are also perceptive and passionate, intellectually challenging, and spiritually inspiring. In my *Seeing through Texts*[2] I explored how these songs were received and understood in the community of Śrīvaiṣṇavas who read them and commented on them.

As I wrote the book, I was very much caught up into that Śrīvaiṣṇava world. I wrote much of the book's first draft while in India, where I tried hard to think, imagine, even pray as would an insider to the tradition—at least insofar as this was possible within the obvious limits of being a foreigner, not educated adequately for the work I had undertaken, settled as a Catholic but not a Śrīvaiṣṇava priest, and so on. I studied with several Śrīvaiṣṇava teachers, I visited temples every day, I made friends, and deepened and complicated my understanding of religious commitment. I could imagine becoming a Śrīvaiṣṇava for good intellectual reasons and in accord with the instincts of the heart.

While working on the book, I was also living in a Jesuit community and so remained mindful too of the ideas, traditions, practices, and obligations that came with Christian communal life. Had I succeeded too well in finding a place among Śrīvaiṣṇavas, the Jesuit community would have questioned my presence in its midst. I needed both to succeed and to fail in the ambitions surrounding my book project so that I could be something of an insider there while remaining an insider here. In the end, I felt neither entirely an outsider to the Śrīvaiṣṇava community nor really an insider; I was a lifelong insider to the Jesuit and Catholic communities, but now I had complicated that identity by entering further into a Hindu community than my fellow Jesuits would have been inclined to do. I was neither here nor there, though in a way both. In Chennai in the summer of 2003, a prominent Śrīvaiṣṇava leader told me that his community considered me to be one of them despite the fact that I was a Catholic priest; inevitably, I offered my own qualification, explaining that my empathy was possible because I was and remained a Catholic priest. Which of us was right?

Of course, people in the tradition one targets for empathy may not be willing to accept outsiders (or some particular outsider) as more than tourists or busybodies; they may simply disagree and say that becoming an insider is not as easy or proper as I might optimistically imagine it to be. Some Hindus and Christians reject the notion that a

theologian might become an insider to a tradition other than her or his own. Many Hindus believe that one must be born a Hindu, hence participating in the full range of *saṃskāras* (sacraments marking the stages and events of life) and natural/cultural benefits that begin at least as early as conception. To be a proper thinker who reflects properly on Hindu truths, morals, practices, one would therefore have to be born into a Hindu community. I recall not being allowed into two well-known Śrīvaiṣṇava temples reserved for "Hindus only." That I felt myself more than a tourist, interested religiously as well as intellectually and quite the kind of person their deities would want to see, made little impression on the temple guardians. I also know Christians genuinely hostile toward the idea of entering temples and even of reading Hindu texts. Also in Chennai, I was recently told by a religious sister, "Don't study their texts, you might find them interesting." For the former group, it seems that the point is that non-Indians simply do not belong; for the latter, that belonging is all too possible and a kind of travel down the slippery slope of getting involved. I stood in the middle, disagreeing with both, believing involvement possible and real, inevitable, and on the whole a very good idea.

To clarify the issues and accentuate the tensions involved in crossing religious boundaries and modestly claiming the status of an insider to another tradition, I have been studying Hindu goddesses, figures who seem to have no place in the Christian tradition. As I complete this essay, I am completing a book entitled *Divine Mother, Blessed Mother*.[3] It is rather closely focused as a reflection on just three Hindu praise hymns (*stotras*) in praise of a goddess (most generally, "Devī"): Lakṣmī, consort of Nārāyaṇa, in the sixty-one verses of the *Śrī Guṇa Ratna Kośa* ("Treasury of the Jewels that are Śrī's Qualities") of Parāśara Bhaṭṭar (twelfth century); Tripureśvarī ("the queen of the three cities"), or simply Devī ("the Goddess"), in the hundred verses of the *Saundarya Laharī* ("Wave of Beauty"), attributed to Śaṅkarācārya (eighth century); and Apirāmi (the goddess of the temple in Tirukkaṭaiyūr) in the hundred verses of the *Apirāmi Antāti* ("Linked Verses for the Beautiful One") authored by Apirāmi Bhaṭṭar (eighteenth century). Each hymn weaves into praise of a Goddess some information about her place in the tradition, claims about her metaphysical, cosmological, and religious status, and her relationship to other deities and to her supreme divine spouse. The texts are also practical, offering indications about how she is to be worshipped properly and what is to be gained from such worship. Even the sheer fact of voicing such hymns aloud makes one gradually into the kind of person who believes what she or he is singing. My reading of each

hymn has been enriched by a tradition of commentaries that enable the newcomer (even without a teacher, if one not be available) to begin learning how to read as the insiders do.

The challenges arising as we try to understand such Hindu goddess traditions are considerable enough for an Indologist who wishes to master this body of material within the context of its often somewhat elusive written and oral Tantric background. A scholar of religion, too, is required to puzzle out the meaning of the data, deciding whether to compare and universalize Tantric meanings, or resist that process. Both are also challenged to keep up with the burgeoning array of studies on goddesses, translations, Indian and Western feminist readings of goddess materials, and related issues. But I am primarily interested in the different and, in a way, still more acute challenges that arise for the Christian theologian who undertakes the study of goddesses. Christian faith has found no place for the study and cult of goddesses, while the traditions of Christian theology reject the language of goddesses and deny its helpfulness in understanding divine reality; yet by study we begin to understand and begin to become insiders to the goddess traditions we study, even as Christian theology in theory excludes a positive appropriation of those traditions. This good quandary—we can understand Hindu goddess hymns but we ought not to follow out the implications of that understanding—becomes vivid as one reads the three hymns.

Take, for example, several verses early in the *Saundarya Laharī*:

> O great pride of the vanquisher of cities,
> with jingling girdle
> You stoop under breasts like the frontal globes of a young elephant,
> You are slim of waist,
> Your face like the autumnal full moon,
> in Your hands are bow, arrows, noose and goad:
> may You stand forth before us! (7)
> There—
> in the ocean of nectar,
> on the isle of jewels edged by groves of sura trees,
> within the pleasure garden of nīpa trees,
> inside the mansion built of wish-fulfilling gems,
> on the couch of Śiva's own form,
> on the cushion that is highest Śiva,
> there the fortunate worship You,
> O wave of consciousness and bliss. (8)

The portrait of Devī presented for visualization (verse 7) and as the embodiment of pleasure whom worshippers approach in increasing awareness and joy (verse 8) offers a compelling invitation to move toward communing with, addressing, and worshipping Devī. We are gradually

filled with the perfected divine pleasure presented at the *Saundarya Laharī*'s climax (verses 92–95), where the devotee reaches the entrance to Her presence:

> Your servants, Druhiṇa, Hari, Rudra, and Īśvara form Your couch,
> and Śiva seems a bedsheet of transparent hue,
> as if the subtle erotic sentiment were embodied,
> red in desire, reflecting Your radiance,
> and milking the pleasure in Your eyes. (92)
> You are the inner precinct of the cities' foe and so
> the goal of worshiping Your feet is not easily accomplished
> by those with feeble senses, and so
> the immortals, Śatamakha in front, achieve unequalled perfection—
> with Aṇimā and the others who stand at Your doorway. (95)[4]

What we do at that point is up to us, but the hymn's power lies in its success in creating a situation where our choices are possible and in a sense required.

The verses between 8 and 91 may be divided into two sections. The first section (8–41) presents a required purification of the senses, a distillation to fundamental essences of the meaning of "the Goddess," and an interior appropriation of that meaning in contemplation. The second section (42–91) offers a long, loving contemplation of Devī, head to toe. These verses make clear even to a stolidly neutral scholar that she or he can deconstruct, recompose, and begin to see what he or she already understands when referring to the "goddess."[5]

Those entirely inside a tradition, diligently committed to it, and properly trained over a long time will know more than those who have not had the benefit of that education. Tantric practitioners learning with Tantric masters are by definition the insiders to Tantric study; such initiates will undoubtedly understand all of this much better than I do after several years of some reading and thinking about the *Saundarya Laharī*. But such differences are more quantitative than qualitative; the required knowledge and the proffered intimacy with Devī are not absolutely inaccessible to the inquiring scholar from another tradition, even if bereft of an adequate background. We learn somehow and somewhat, and such learning is definitely better than nothing. But if I understand even a little, then I see more, and while still an insider to the Christian tradition, I have to start thinking about what is demanded of the person who reads attentively a religiously powerful text from another tradition, about what it means to suppose that Devī might become manifest or to deny that she exists and can become manifest.

To be really bothered by such matters, we have to be theological insiders in one tradition while yet learning from another. Such demands

creatively vex those who hold the objects of theology to be real and true (however nuanced the hermeneutics may be), the truth to be knowable and expressible, access to the interiority of another tradition possible, and faith and understanding influential on one another in largely positive but also unsettling ways. I have had to reflect on how my study of goddesses may threaten a Christian community that does not seek any encounter with Hindu goddesses and so does not want much in the way of scholarship that defends the rational plausibility of the worship of goddesses. A theologian can indeed begin to understand goddess traditions; the community to which the theologian belongs may not, however, concede space for that learning, nor for the practices and beliefs that may follow.

In *Hindu God, Christian God*,[6] I conclude, "I confess that Jesus is Lord, but I cannot now assert that Śiva is not Lord nor that Nārāyaṇa did not graciously undergo embodiment in order to enable humans to encounter their God. The work of the theologian is a work of faith and reason, and it is not complete until both have done the best they can." (p. 181) By extension, upon studying the *Saundarya Laharī* I become able to understand and even be inclined to recite the words, "Devī, may you stand forth before us!" Yet even as my appreciation grows, I still remain unable to voice so definite an entreaty. The rules governing insider identity in the Catholic community forbid prayer to Devī, but neither can I, as scholar, merely state, "The goddess meditated upon, contemplated, addressed in the *Saundarya Laharī* does not exist."

I may, then, be caught between faith and understanding, new understanding and new faith. This is the kind of awkward conclusion that dissatisfies the kind of reader who seeks information only or merely definitive judgments about what is true or right or worth discussing. But not pondering what it might mean for me to understand and worship a goddess would also fail to do justice to Christian theology, wherein understanding, faith, and practice are inseparable. To honor Christian integrity, the theologian is better off with her or his painful and worthwhile insider-outsider problem, where truth matters even if practicing what we understand seems nearly impossible.[7]

III

I like to think that when my scholarship places me in the awkward position of belonging on both sides of a religious boundary while yet not being entirely acceptable on either, I am continuing an old Jesuit tradition, that of the missionary scholars. These venturesome figures studied their way to the edge, reaching the shadowy twilight ground

where multiple religions are accessible and the rights of ownership not entirely clear. Putting together *Preaching Wisdom to the Wise*[8] with Anand Amaladass, S.J., was the opportunity to look a bit more closely at one famous example of this phenomenon. This is a volume of translations from the Tamil and Latin of three major writings by Roberto de Nobili (1577–1656), one of the first Jesuit scholars to engage in the study of religion in India. His agenda remained that of a consummate Christian insider—he sought to convert Indians to Roman Catholic Christianity—but for the sake of this he sought to become an insider to Indian culture, European only in the things he could not change. He was a pioneer and received a pioneer's reward. He dressed as a renunciant and strove mightily to become as Indian as possible; his lifestyle, social choices, and vast learning gave him a certain new identity and experience within Brahmanical Hinduism. His effort to inculturate Christianity and make conversion as nontraumatic as possible for Brahmins was controversial—was he becoming more Indian or more Hindu?—and he suffered the criticisms of some other missionaries and of the Church hierarchy.

There is no way to replicate de Nobili's project and situation today, even if we wanted to, but his erudite quandary does nicely represent the dynamic of the insider-outsider problem in its Catholic form: by learning and adaptation, cultivating participation in another culture/religion; making progress in doing so, while encountering the resistance of the members of that other community; at the same time, because of the same progress, the arising of a certain incomprehension and dis-ease in one's home community; communication and belonging in both directions, though entirely successfully in neither. He provoked some suspicion and hostility among Christians and Hindus, but the full range of his work actually lacked an adequate response, in part because he had no readers who could read both Tamil and Latin. Similarly, the problem of the limitations of double-tradition belonging is evident in the way comparative scholarship, though perhaps of some interest to all concerned (even on the grounds of novelty alone) rarely receives an adequate response from insiders in either tradition, since neither accepts the obvious challenge posed to it.

In my mind, our volume on de Nobili served as a kind of mirror for the Jesuit scholar and offered me an opportunity, after twenty-five years of studying Hinduism, to examine more thoroughly my own insider status as a Roman Catholic and Jesuit when I have learned another tradition more deeply and sympathetically than most Christians or Jesuits ever do. I viewed myself in the mirror of de Nobili's project in order to consider what it might mean for a Jesuit in the year 2000 to

venture to become something of an insider to Hindu traditions, given today's different views of religion and the choices of individuals with respect to the doctrines and practices of traditions. Unsurprisingly, while the particular issues differ greatly four hundred years later and in the American academic world, I have in a way tried to share his dilemma: if we cross cultural (and in our day what can more easily be conceived of as religious) boundaries in order to understand and be understood while at the same time intending to remain aligned to our original religious community, we may end up interior to both and exterior to both. Success in understanding the other, like failure, can leave us in a difficult situation—on the edge between communities.

My own writing, for instance, may to some extent please and disturb both Christians and Hindus, but it remains peripheral enough to both that the religious leaders, intellectuals, and ordinary believers can ignore it without seeming to miss anything they really need to know. Seeking to be insiders twice over, we may instead turn out to be marginal twice over. But at least this is a good and time-honored position to be in. The real issue, clearly, is not that there are closed borders and privileged realms belonging to insiders only, but that there are more possibilities for crossing over than any of us is ready for.

IV

In the preceding pages I have illustrated a particular version of the challenge faced by those who take seriously both insider privilege and the power of faith and intellect to transgress insider boundaries. Though somewhat idiosyncratic, my account is also deeply Roman Catholic and representative of a tradition different from the Anglo-colonialist discourse in reaction to which a good part of subaltern discourse related to India has arisen. Hence my problem has been not the impenetrability of the "other" but the complexities and ambiguities that follow upon the incomplete, imperfect, yet real crossing of settled boundaries and a subsequent return whence we came. While I have not disputed the idea that insiders, even those born into traditions where the privileging of insider knowledge is a paramount value, will most often have richer, more coherent understandings of the particular truths and values of a tradition, neither have I conceded any absolute standing to this privileging. We can become more or less insiders, more or less involved in a religious community other than our own, simply because we can learn and take to heart what we learn. No tradition is entirely immune to the arrival of interested persons who can to some extent, in some way, learn to see the world through

the eyes of that community's tradition and speak authentically from that perspective.

Our identities as scholars are in many ways shaped by the array of complexities that influence every human life; birth matters, and so, too, intelligence, family, education, money, relationships, and interests at a particular time in life. Such factors determine in important ways whether we will actually be in a position to choose to become scholars, and of course we have some, though not complete, freedom in regard to what we make of the possibilities. By a further complication, theologians are scholars involved in religious communities where faith and practice make claims on the minds and hearts of their theologians. Those of us who are theologians also intelligently and freely shape our situations, transforming and resignifying what at the start may have been simply a given, socially defined insider (or outsider) identity as a religious intellectual. Being an insider does matter, and there is an enduring privilege to insider status. But we can become insiders, wherever we might have been born; being an insider is in part a constructed situation.

Many of us also choose to remain aligned with communities to which we have belonged for a long time or at some point have chosen to join. But as intellectuals we can also follow questions where they lead; through honest scholarship, faith and reason are accentuated and occasionally brought into acute tension, and community membership becomes fragile. We can choose to keep thinking and writing in a way that transgresses the expected intellectual boundaries of the home community and to explore the home terrain of another community. Scholars may, for scholarly reasons, grow distant from the religious communities to which they had belonged, and find their loyalties divided, now owed in part to some other religious community.

This complex insider identity—at once enhanced and diminished—may in the end generate enough tension to problematize membership in either established community. Rather frequently, communities (including academe) resist the arrival of the outsider and redefine the situation so as to explain why the outsider cannot become an insider. The theologian who is a comparativist may discover, in the act of becoming a comparativist, a new identity welcome neither here nor there. He or she may then become rather isolated and may instead become involved in creating a community where the person who has studied across religious boundaries can again find a home. In this situation we may experience, by choice, a particularly acute and luminous version of what is increasingly the human condition: a superabundance of belonging as, wittingly or not, we keep losing our identities but also become agents in forming a new community with new conventions

about who God is and how God is to be approached. Thereafter, there will yet again be other new insiders and new outsiders who will insist on expanding the boundaries still further.[9]

According to the Catholic perspective that has provided the map for my explorations across religious boundaries, whether the theologian who seems an insider to several traditions is right or wrong will ultimately depend, as we put it, on what God is like and what God now intends. In the study and understanding of religions and due to resources of nature, reason, custom, tradition, and religious practices—ours and theirs—we are encountering God, and God will have to decide whether communities should be allowed to succeed in guarding their boundaries jealously or find ways to make more room for insiders and outsiders not inclined to respect such boundaries.[10]

NOTES

1. On my own intellectual and spiritual development, see also my "In Ten Thousand Places, In Every Blade of Grass: Uneventful but True Confessions about Finding God in India, and Here Too," *Studies in Jesuit Spirituality* 28:3 (May 1996).
2. *Seeing through Texts: Doing Theology among the Śrīvaiṣṇavas of South India* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).
3. *Divine Mother, Blessed Mother: Hindu Goddesses and the Virgin Mary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
4. My translation, but I am indebted for many insights to S. Subrahmanya Sastri and T. R. Srinivasa Ayyangar, *Saundarya-Laharī (The Ocean of Beauty)* (Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1965).
5. See *Divine Mother, Blessed Mother.*
6. *Hindu God, Christian God: How Reason Helps Break Down the Boundaries between Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).
7. I have also tried to move in the other direction by examining how the mind regularly crosses religious and cultural boundaries. *Hindu God, Christian God* represented for me my most explicit and methodical experiment in cross-cultural reasoning. It explored the constitutive rational elements in the process of living intelligent lives within traditions and learning across religious boundaries. I sought to appeal to the minds of my readers in a way that did not involve much in the way of empathy or a disposition to participate in the religion of the other. My hope was that any theologian willing to think carefully would begin to theologize using both the Hindu and the Christian ideas I was presenting.
8. *Preaching Wisdom to the Wise: Three Treatises by Roberto de Nobili, S.J.* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2000), coauthored with Anand Amaladass, S.J.
9. On multiple religious identities, see John Berthrong, *The Divine Deli: Religious Identity in the North American Cultural Mosaic* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999); and Catherine Cornille, ed., *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002). On the theological possibilities, see Francis X. Clooney, S.J., "Extending the Canon: Some Implications of a Hindu Argument about Scripture," *Harvard Theological Review* 85:2 (1992): 197–215.
10. On the idea that it is meaningful to claim an active role in shaping community in a world of pluralism, see my "God for Us: Multiple Religious Belonging as Spiritual Practice and Divine Response" in *Many Mansions?* 44–60.

6

RELIGIOUS IDENTITY, SCHOLARSHIP, AND TEACHING RELIGION

Rita M. Gross

A common prejudice in the discipline of religious studies is that the best scholars are "objective," detached from and uninvolved with their subject matter. Put another way, the best scholars are those who have a certain distance from, who do not "do" what they "are." However, because objectivity is impossible, it is important to rethink conventional assumptions regarding the relationship between religious identity and teaching or doing research on religion. Role-reversal fantasies are often effective techniques for highlighting the absurdity of certain positions. So let me begin with one.

Suppose, for a moment, that the academic study of religion could be done only by outsiders, that is by those who do not espouse what they study. This would mean, of course, that Christianity and Judaism could be studied only by non-Christians and non-Jews, respectively. It would also mean that critical reflection on these traditions from within (that is to say, theology) would be impossible (at least in the academy). Suppose that, in a further caricature of Enlightenment objectivity, we went even further and claimed that the best academic results are achieved when one has the maximum possible distance from one's object of study. This would mean that ideal scholars of Christianity or Judaism would be, for example, Asians trained in Asia, who use traditional Asian methodologies, rather than being Jews or Christians trained in Jewish, Christian, or European institutions. They would employ Asian methodologies to analyze Judaism or Christianity. That way, we would

be more likely to get "unbiased" accounts of Christianity and Judaism! (Actually, there is something to be said for this position *as one among many ways* of studying and analyzing Judaism, Christianity, and European worldviews.) Of course, it is clear why this is a fantasy scenario. No one could ever take such a position seriously, at least when the religions under discussion are Judaism and Christianity. Consider, however, that for decades this was the reigning worldview concerning the study of Asian religions. Insiders trained in their own traditions were summarily dismissed, as if being a scholar-insider was an oxymoron.

GENERALIZATIONS ABOUT RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AND TEACHING OR DOING SCHOLARSHIP ON RELIGION

The main focus of this essay is the relationship between religious identity and teaching religion (or religious studies), but this issue is a subset within the larger topic of the relationship between identity and scholarship generally.[1] Therefore I will begin with three generalizations that pertain both to teaching and to scholarly research and writing. Because all three generalizations are equally important, it is difficult to prioritize them.

1. Relationship between Identity and Scholarship Cannot Be Avoided

There is *no* question as to whether or not there is a relationship between identity and scholarship, broadly defined; the real question is *what* that relationship is or should be ideally. I have narrated several times how discovering in the late sixties the androcentrism of the methodologies of conventional religious studies shattered once and for all, for me, the illusion that scholarship in religious studies is or could be "objective" and value-free. It is shocking that after decades of feminist and other identity-based forms of scholarship, scholars of religion could still believe there is a neutral no-place from which they could view religions. Yet that position is still strong in the field of religious studies, due, I would suggest, to the academic vulnerability felt by many scholars of religion and their consequent severe case of what I call "science envy." But there *is* no neutral no-place; every scholar of religion positions herself somewhere. Even the purported "value-free" outlook of the European Enlightenment is also a position, not a neutral no-place. The position frequently taken by scholars of religion—that religion itself is ridiculous and no creditable scholar of religion could also affirm a religious position—is even more partisan. In fact, it is just as partisan as the position of an apologist who advocates for or against any specific religious tradition. Being antireligious is no more neutral and nonpartisan than advocating a specific religion.

This being the case, I have long suggested that the closest semblance to neutrality we can achieve is to be aware of and self-conscious concerning the identities that influence our teaching and scholarship, to state those positions and identities appropriately, and then to argue their pros and cons with other scholars. Such a course of action is far more honest and less self-delusional than trying to hide our identities from ourselves while coyly pretending to other scholars that our positions and identities are irrelevant to our choices of research topics and our conclusions regarding those topics. I have been accused of open partisanship for taking this position, but I have argued that a scholar who discloses her positions and defends her reasons for taking those positions is *less*, not *more*, partisan than someone who believes that her scholarship is without an agenda.[2]

2. Identities and Circumstances

The interesting and relevant question concerning the relationship between identity and scholarship is this: Under what circumstances do specific identities come into play? No one has a single, overriding identity that always preempts all other aspects of one's experience. "Identity" is not a monolith to be used in the singular when we talk in a sophisticated way about the relationship between *identities* and scholarship. Early feminist scholars learned, to our sorrow, that putting all our identity apples in the basket of "women's experience" brought us the accusation that we assumed too much at the same time as we ignored too much. Women also have identities bound up with race, class, culture, religion, sexual orientation, and a host of other factors, in addition to a gender identity.

Furthermore, the specific relationship between identity and scholarship depends on the context. Is one doing descriptive work or critical, constructive work, or some combination of both? (That is possible, contrary to the opinions of some in religious studies.) Is one directing one's remarks to colleagues or to students? I will argue later that one's audience is crucial to determining when it is appropriate to highlight (or conceal) which identities. If one is teaching, what kind of students in what kind of institution? Identity and self-revelation are often important, but having a certain identity is never a guarantee of authority, nor is proclaiming it an end in itself. It cannot be said too often: much depends on the context.

For example, in my own case, these days the identity I most often wind up being concerned with is my identity as a Buddhist, given that "insiders" to Buddhism and Hinduism, especially white insiders, face a great deal of suspicion in all academic institutions where religion is taught, whether they be colleges and universities or seminaries. But one of my main foci is doing critical and constructive Buddhist

thought. How could I not have a Buddhist identity, given that focus? Disallowing Buddhist (and other nonmainstream) scholars from the academy has the effect of disallowing Buddhist critical and constructive thought, relegating Buddhism to "exotic" or museum status, which in fact is the position taken by much of the Buddhist studies establishment. However, when others see me mainly as a feminist theologian and scholar, my female identity becomes paramount. But which actually takes precedence? This depends on what I am trying to do. *Buddhism after Patriarchy* could not have been written by a non-Buddhist, but my Buddhist identity is barely mentioned in *Feminism and Religion*. It is not really relevant to the topic, and I cannot remember for sure whether it is mentioned. On the other hand, my attempt to balance Western and non-Western religions in that account of feminism and religion is due to my identity as a feminist involved in a non-Western religion, and due as well to my frustration with the Christian bias of much feminist scholarship. Likewise, a male Buddhist would probably not have written *Buddhism after Patriarchy*. Identity matters, but which one, when, and how?

Actually, for the purposes of this paper, the identities that turn out to be most important are that I am not a Christian and that I am a critical and constructive thinker, that is, a theologian, of a Buddhist variety. But the emphasis here is more on not being a Christian than on being a Buddhist. It may seem strange to focus on an identity characterized in negative terms, but I know from talking with my Goddess-oriented feminist colleagues that other types of non-Christian theologians face similar problems and challenges in a culture, both general and academic, that is so Christian-dominated. It may also seem strange to claim that Christianity dominates the culture, both academic and general. Many people think that the culture has become much more secular in the recent past. Perhaps that is the case, but, as I often tell my students, one needs to live as a non-Christian actively practicing another religion, rather than as an ex-Christian atheist or agnostic, to realize how unconsciously Christian much of the culture really is. Simple things, such as the way time is marked, the way oaths are sworn in court, the language on the money and in the pledge of allegiance, all demonstrate this point quite adequately.

As for being a Buddhist critical and constructive thinker, this is a category—a disciplinary pigeonhole—that is not yet recognized by the academy or by academic theologians.[3] I have become very sensitive to the way in which "theology" and "Christian theology" are collapsed and assumed to be identical, as if only Christians did critical and constructive thinking about their religious tradition. But why should it be

assumed that every constructive thinker thinks Christianity? I have found it exasperating that one of the academic enterprises to which I have devoted considerable energy throughout my career—feminist theology—has fallen into this fallacy. Therefore I have begun to critique the feminist theology community very sharply for not including their non-Christian feminist colleagues in their discourse.[4]

3. Identity as a Scholar

Identification as a scholar is critical. Whatever other identities one may have, this one cannot be absent for someone the likes of me. Being an insider is not enough, because insiders are often mistaken about their tradition or have limited perspectives on it. For example, I never cease to be amazed that relatively frequently, when I look at *rupas* (icons) of Hindu deities in shops in the U.S., Indian shopkeepers will authoritatively declare "That's Kali!" when in fact it is a *rupa* of Durga or Shiva. In that case, the white non-Hindu (me) is a more reliable source of information than the insider.

One could also imagine the example of a non-self-reflexive Buddhist, even one who is well trained in that tradition. It would not be surprising if such a person uncritically adopted at face value whatever the Buddhist tradition says about itself. On the other hand, someone who is both a Buddhist and a critical scholar would seek to understand *why* the tradition says what it does about itself, and then *evaluate* those claims. Often academic scholarship brings to light aspects of a religious tradition that adherents without academic loyalties do not notice or are reluctant to acknowledge. This is especially the case with historical narratives or with social practices that are highly questionable. I would argue that an insider who simply ignores elements of her tradition brought to light by the critical methods of academic scholarship is remiss and inadequate as a scholar, even if she is well trained by standards internal to her tradition.

However, being a scholar by itself may not be enough either. Consider once again the case of the scholar who is a partisan of the methods of the European Enlightenment and who is committed to the use of exclusively European methods for studying and understanding religion. Such a person would insist that what the tradition says about itself cannot be taken seriously and that religious people have no realistic idea of what they are doing. Instead, they need to have social scientists tell them what they are *really* doing when they engage in religious behaviors. Such a scholar is just as limited as a traditionally trained scholar who refuses to take into account what critical Western academic scholarship says about the tradition. She is just as limited

because she also is willfully ignoring information and perspectives that do not fit her grid.

Taking identity as a scholar as an ever-present bottom line, the scholar-practitioner or scholar-insider can rise above the limitations that often beset unscholarly insiders or outsiders scornful of what is inside. Such a person is trained in both a religious tradition and in the academy. To use an analogy that those who value philological training should understand: a scholar-practitioner is "bilingual" in a way that someone who is only a scholar or someone who is only a practitioner cannot be. Such a scholar-insider has distinct advantages *in some cases* (but not all) because of the necessary link between experience and knowledge.

The argument is simple: some experiences would be difficult or impossible for one to acquire because of who one is. It is perhaps easiest to demonstrate this claim with examples regarding race or sexual orientation. How can a white person creditably explain the black experience of racism in America, or a straight person explain what gay and lesbian people experience? On the other hand, I would argue that white people can research or teach the history of black culture in America and straight people can research or teach what lesbians and gay men have written about their experiences. The distinction between teaching *about* a certain perspective and teaching *that* perspective is critical.

The issues are similar with religions. Many of us teach and do research on religious perspectives to which we do not adhere, and that fact does not disqualify our research; it does not negate the validity of our teaching. But it is difficult to imagine how someone who is not an "insider" could do research on certain topics or evaluate others' scholarship on that topic. Any religious tradition dependent on initiation and secret teachings simply could not be well researched or understood by someone who is not privy to those materials, though this material could be taught about in a classroom by depending on the work of others who are insiders. For example, I have practiced and studied for more than twenty years aspects of Vajrayana Buddhism that depend on initiation, but I still am surprised, after yet another initiation, by what I had not yet been taught. How could someone who is not even eligible for the initiations know what is going on?[5]

Regarding religion, however, I would argue that when teaching about religions that are not culturally mainstream, special sensitivity about insiders and outsiders is required. Regarding these traditions especially, I will argue that bilingual insiders make ideal scholars and teachers. It is simply too easy for those who are in the majority to

think they understand the perspectives of other smaller, less powerful groups of people. But minorities and those not in power are notoriously more adept at reading the hegemonic culture than the reverse. In North America, Jews know more about Christians than vice versa. Women usually know more about men's cultures than the reverse. The same holds for straights and gays. Given Christian hegemony in North America, it is hence important that non-Christian traditions be taught by those who, in addition to having appropriate academic credentials, actually know what is going on inside them.

IDENTITY AND THE POLITICS OF THE RELIGIOUS STUDIES CLASSROOM

These generalizations, which apply to *both* scholarship and teaching, set the stage for the issues concerning pedagogy and identity that I wish to focus upon in this paper. I will presuppose that the classroom is being devoted to teaching world religions, a comparative topic, or some non-Christian religion, because that is what I do. Throughout my career, I have discovered that teaching world religions and/or non-Christian religions is an intensely political process, so perhaps my topic could best be understood as "identity and the politics of the religious studies classroom" for both professors and students, both in college settings and in seminary settings.

My interest in this topic stems from two incidents that occurred in the spring of 1999. I devoted much of my energy that spring to writing a long article to present as the Lowell lecture at the Boston University School of Theology.[6] In that lecture, I stressed that world religions need to be taught at seminaries and that for many reasons, the people most suited to teach those courses would be non-Christian scholar-practitioners of one of the world's religions.

Not long after I completed and presented that paper, the Cobb-Abe Buddhist-Christian dialogue group met. A number of us, including José Cabezón and myself, were informally discussing the topic of the religious identity of those teaching various seminary courses. By then I had heard many times from many people that while it might be a good idea to employ non-Christians to teach world religions in seminaries, it simply could not be done in most instances for political reasons. The faculty or the board simply would not stand for allowing a practitioner of another religion to teach anything, including world religions, in a seminary. Then it was pointed out that, in a few instances, Jews have received appointments to teach the Bible and even the New Testament in Christian seminaries. One of the members of the group, who teaches at

a Catholic institution, responded, "Over my dead body at my institution. That topic can only be taught appropriately by a Christian."

My immediate reaction was very negative. "What's the problem with a Jew teaching New Testament? Wouldn't that be very interesting?" I asked myself. Then I immediately asked myself if I was guilty of a double standard. I wanted Buddhism to be taught by Buddhists or at least by a non-Christian in a seminary context, but I also thought it was appropriate for Jews to teach the New Testament, even in a seminary context. If Buddhism is best taught by Buddhists, then should not the New Testament (read Christianity) best be taught by a Christian? On the other hand, our colleague's insistence that Christianity should be taught by Christians strengthened my position that Buddhism should be taught by Buddhists. Otherwise, this seminary would be guilty of an appalling double standard between methods for teaching Christian and non-Christian religions. I did not ask him if he would make the same claim about how Buddhism should be taught, but I doubt he would have thought it was much of a problem if some Christian on the faculty taught Buddhism. As I reflected on the ethical and pedagogical issues of what values should emerge from studying religions, in both seminary and college contexts, and how the identities of the professor-scholar should play into this teaching, these reflections have coalesced in the form of the present essay.

The Religious Studies Classroom

Hence I turn to the question of why the classroom, especially the religious studies classroom, cannot find a neutral no-place from which to dispense its perspectives, just as scholarship on religion cannot find that neutral no-place. Education has an agenda. The claim that educators should just present all the facts and then leave the students alone to think what they will is about as accurate as its equivalent concerning scholars and their identities. There is a reason why, when I took classes in "economic theory" in college, all the theories discussed were some variety of capitalism and there was barely any mention, certainly no thorough discussion, of socialist economic theories. The problem in both pedagogy and scholarship is that well-established paradigms are easily regarded as "objective" and "neutral," which is why the politics of the religious studies classroom is so difficult to discuss.

In my view, the religious studies classroom cannot avoid being a morally charged environment. I hope that many students will leave the classroom with perspectives different from those with which they entered. The academic teaching of religion is not religious indoctrination. I would claim that even a seminary should instruct about religion and

religions, not simply inculcate the specific denominational perspective of the seminary. But such instruction is not value-free either. Good academic teaching of religion probably *will* change the religious attitudes of a significant number of students who take such classes. And I want them to change to become more appreciative of religious diversity. Given that the classroom cannot be 100 percent neutral and objective, I would advocate that it should be used to promote the knowledge and the psychological skills required for living peaceably and comfortably with diversities of all kinds, inculcating in students the value that religious pluralism is a benefit rather than a problem. Religious diversity is not going to go away; in fact, it is becoming ever more part of the experience of all people in North America, which is why good training about world religions and religious diversity is so important both in college and in seminary classrooms.

Part of that good training involves developing an evenhandedness regarding the various religions, including students' own religion if they have a religious affiliation. The same rules of analysis and the same search for historical accuracy apply to all religions. The student should grow past the point of regarding the same kind of story as ridiculous if it occurs in the context of another religion but "true" when it occurs in her own religion, for example. Developing this evenhandedness makes it much more difficult to advocate some religions and denigrate others.

Another major part of that good training involves developing empathy for all major religious perspectives—some genuine ability to understand the inner logic and coherence that makes a religion cogent to its followers. Many students do not enter the classroom with such values in place, due to religious training they may have received in other contexts. Therefore studying world religions evenhandedly and empathetically may well result in changed attitudes for some students. This should be the case for seminary classrooms and college religious classrooms alike, though many of the strategies will be different. The prime question is how best to promote the goal advocated above. The answers to that question will be crucial in explaining why I do not believe I engaged in a double standard when I advocated that Buddhists or non-Christians would be the ideal candidates to teach world religions in a seminary classroom while seeing the value in a Jew's teaching Christianity or New Testament in a seminary.

What happens when students enter a religious studies classroom? First, although adjudicating between and ranking the various religions is not part of such pedagogy, nevertheless, some students eventually may decide to adopt a religion different from the one with which they

entered the classroom or else become much more critical of their inherited perspective. Some people find this possibility threatening. One of my Goddess-worshipping feminist colleagues tells a story about not being rehired at a Christian seminary because one student complained to the administration. The student apparently began to doubt her Christian faith after being exposed to non-Christian feminist perspectives! My colleague was offered the alternative of teaching under the condition that a Christian colleague always be present in her classroom! I would respond that needing to be ignorant of the alternatives to be able to maintain one's religious position is not very laudable, certainly not for would-be Christian clergy. Second, in the process of learning the skills and knowledge necessary for appreciating diversity, students may well discover that the monolithic or universalistic presuppositions with which they may have entered the classroom have become untenable. In my view, students "*should* feel that sexist, racist, ethnocentric, and religious chauvinism, if present, are being threatened by the academic study of religion. . . . It is rarely possible to conclude one's studies carrying the same opinions regarding religious, ethnic, class, gender, and cultural diversity with which one began."[7]

Certain conservative critics would attack this pedagogical perspective as inappropriately value-oriented, as the agenda of a "tenured radical" who is out to influence how students think. Such criticisms assume that it is possible to teach about religion without promoting either greater or lesser tolerance and openness to religious diversity, but I would argue that such an outcome is not possible. They also assume that it is irrelevant whether students are more or less prejudiced regarding those who are different religiously after taking a class in world religions. But I find it morally repugnant and socially irresponsible to be indifferent about whether or not education equips people to cope well with diversity.

It has already been noted that people who belong to dominant groups or those in the majority group (these two could be different) especially need to develop evenhandedness and empathy regarding other religious perspectives. It is very easy for a person in a dominant group to assume that her perspective is "normal" and probably "the best," to be quite unaware that there are other alternatives, and to know almost nothing about how the world works for people who are "different." Regarding those few variables in which I happen to be part of a dominant and majority group, being white and being heterosexual, I know how easy it can be for me to take certain things for granted and to lack knowledge and understanding. Becoming educated about other ways of being human is a moral obligation that falls especially

heavily on those in the majority, simply because there is so much temptation and so much opportunity to remain indifferent to and unaware of alternative realities.

As a non-Christian, and as a scholar-professor of religion—two different identities—I am especially concerned about how to proceed with my pedagogical agenda of promoting the value of religious diversity, helping students see it not as a problem but as something positive. My task is made infinitely more difficult and urgent by the historical and contemporary tendency of many Christians to claim universal and exclusive truth for Christianity. Because so many people still regard such claims as normal and appropriate, I suggest that religion has become the only arena of contemporary North American culture in which chauvinism and prejudice are acceptable and can be stated openly without censure. Other chauvinisms are still prevalent, but many will object to their presence, whereas the usual attitude is that *religious* chauvinism is the true and necessary mark of someone who takes his religion seriously.

Some of the reactions to my paper on why seminaries should teach non-Christian religions, and should employ non-Christian scholar-practitioners to do so, demonstrate the acceptability of religious chauvinism quite well. One person said that while it might be an acceptable practice for those who wanted to follow it, the suggestion "carries a terrible message for seminaries and church-related colleges who, for one reason or another, *cannot* (italics added) make that move" to hire non-Christians. Who would dare write that, while it may be an acceptable practice for seminaries and colleges to hire blacks to teach, among other things, African-American religion, promoting the practice of hiring black people would carry a terrible message for seminaries and church-related colleges, who, for one reason or another, just could not hire black people! Earlier I had thought that discrimination on the basis of religion was equally illegal, but it is not when it comes to teaching positions at seminaries and church-related colleges. The unfortunate effects of these discriminatory and chauvinistic policies are that those who most need to hear non-Christian religions taught authentically, those who most need to learn that chauvinism and prejudices are always problems, even regarding religion, and those who most need to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary for living comfortably with religious diversity are the least likely to do so.

Fortunately, two important constitutional protections and two relatively recent intellectual developments provide some support for teaching about religion in a way that promotes acceptance and even appreciation of religious diversity. The constitutional protections are,

of course, freedom of religion and separation of church and state. The latter is especially important because it means that, at least in public educational institutions, religion cannot be taught in an adversarial or confessional manner. Given that one is a public employee if one teaches at a state university, one simply cannot teach religion as if one were a religious instructor representing any one of the many religions and indoctrinating the next generation to adhere to that religion (though that is precisely what a number of students in college classes expect and want).

The intellectual developments include the whole development of the academic study of religion and the development of a pluralistic theology of religions in some segments of Christianity. I have often criticized the field for going too far in the direction of disallowing "insiders" as legitimate scholars of religion. Nevertheless, I would be the first to argue that developing methodologies for the academic study of religion and separating them from theology were essential steps in the process of becoming able to teach religion in nonconfessional ways. And the ability to teach religions in a nonconfessional manner is essential to developing appreciation of diverse religions and of religious diversity. The key discovery of the academic study of religion is, in my view, the distinction between "studying *about*" religion and "studying" religion: that one can learn about a religion without adhering to that religion and can appreciate a religion without converting to it. Put another way, one can approach the study of religion with the same dispassion that one approaches other academic subjects. This distinction also opens the way for the possibility that a professor of religion could be an adherent of some religious tradition without proselytizing in the classroom. That possibility, however, has been worked out more clearly by the pluralistic theologians of religion. They demonstrate that it is not an oxymoron both to be devoted to one's own religion and to appreciate religious diversity. They advocate that religious pluralism is a resource rather than a problem.[8] That development itself probably owes something to the academic study of religion, as it became ever more impossible to dismiss other religions as moral and theological mistakes.

Religious Identity and the College Classroom

The religious identity of the professor plays into all that is at stake in the classroom quite differently in college or seminary contexts, in my view. For the college classroom in world religions and/or non-Christian religions, I do not believe the religious identity of the professor should be up for discussion, for many reasons. I would argue, with many, that

religious identity is not a qualification for such a position, but I want to move the discussion further in directions that it does not usually take. First, the professor's open religious identity should not be a *disqualification* either, as it so often is, unless, of course, the professor cannot tell the difference between advocating her religion and being a scholar-practitioner of it, in which case her inadequate pedagogy, not her religious identity, is what is at fault. Second, being so strongly partisan to the Enlightenment view of religion that one's teaching promotes "caring against" religion, in Wendy Doniger's phrase,[9] should also be problematic because it too is an advocacy position. This does not mean that the professor should not bring critical perspectives to religion and the religions, but that religion should not be presented as invalid from the get-go.

The above statements may seem self-contradictory with some of my previous publications on scholarship and identity, for I have argued very strongly that who the scholar is affects his scholarship, and that scholars should not be criticized or punished when it does. But those arguments are made about relationships between colleagues—one's peers. The typical undergraduate classroom is quite different. I never "came out" to my students as a Buddhist, even though that fact was widely known and anyone could have found it out if they tried very hard. Nor would I confirm rumors when students asked me. This was my policy especially in my large sections of Introduction to World Religions. (I did relax it some in upper-division courses with students I knew better, especially when teaching the Buddhism course.) Students would linger after class and eventually ask me which religion I practiced. They said that with each new religion we studied, they were sure that *that* was the one I practiced because it seemed so convincing when I taught about it. But I always replied, "That's for me to know and you to guess."

My reasons for this are completely in line with my pedagogic aim in the course; I want students to appreciate religious diversity and I want to defuse religious chauvinism and exclusivism if they are present. Most of these students come to class either religiously illiterate or quite exclusivist in their religious position (and sometimes both at the same time!). What would be most effective in this situation? Many students believe that putting Christianity on a level playing field with other religions is tantamount to being anti-Christian (one of the most common complaints about many religious studies courses, at least at less prestigious colleges). Many students find it very threatening to be asked to develop empathy for many religious perspectives and say that their religion forbids them to have such attitudes. And many students

do change their attitudes significantly during a semester-long course, often coming to doubt things they had previously been taught. ("Why hasn't anybody ever told me this before?" is an extremely common question.) Growing up in a Christian or monotheistic culture, most students take it for granted, whether or not they are religious themselves, that religions, by nature, all claim that other religious perspectives are "not true."

In such a context, if I were to "come out" in the classroom, the vast majority of students would feel threatened by the fact that I am not a Christian and even more skeptical or mistrustful than they already are. (Even Christian professors are often heavily criticized for not teaching "the real Christianity" and some ambitious students have been known to take a course on Judaism to attempt to convert the rabbi who taught it!) There would also be a widespread assumption that I am biased toward my own religion and against all the other ones, and an almost equally widespread assumption that I am out to convert them. (Once I received a student evaluation for a course on Japanese religion that said I was biased toward my own religion. Given that I do not practice a Japanese religion, it was a truly mystifying comment, but it demonstrates how ready students are to feel threatened and hostile in a classroom dealing with non-Christian religions.)

Instead, I am convinced that I can best promote the values with which I am concerned—empathy for many religious perspectives, appreciation of religious diversity, and a decline in religious chauvinism and exclusivism—by modeling them myself. And I would argue that in the college classroom, keeping my religious identity to myself is an important part of that modeling. The other part is actually *teaching* each religion with all the empathy I can muster, presenting it as I imagine an insider would, to the best of my ability. This requires being able to switch the perspective from within which one is speaking, even moment by moment when I am teaching about the disagreements between Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, for example. The effectiveness of this strategy was unwittingly conceded by one of my most conservative students, who resisted having to take a course on non-Christian religions until he was told that he simply could not graduate with a religion major unless he did. One day he said in class, "You know, everybody says Rita is anti-Christian, but she really isn't. She doesn't say negative things about Christianity. What's wrong with the way she teaches is that she makes all those other religions sound as if they could be true."

Finally, though I advocate not "coming out" in the college classroom, I would also argue that a non-Christian committed practitioner

of another religion should not be discriminated against in the job market for college teachers, because such a person has valuable perspectives to offer. Simply by being an active participant of another religion in a Christian culture, this professor will bring something to the classroom that most professors who are Christian or agnostic would not bring. Again, it is a matter of the link between experience and knowledge, discussed earlier. The non-Christian professor has tasted some of the alternatives in a culture in which Christianity is the dominant religion, and also knows what it is like to be a religious minority. This experience usually makes issues of empathy for many religious perspectives, appreciation of religious diversity, and the problems of religious chauvinism important in their teaching agendas, and also enhances ability to present other perspectives persuasively.

Religious Identity and the Seminary Classroom

Though the goals of promoting empathy for many religious perspectives and appreciation of religious diversity while defusing religious chauvinism remain the same in the seminary context, I argue that different strategies for achieving them are appropriate in a seminary. In a seminary context, not only is disclosure of religious identity appropriate, it is important. In most cases, religion is being studied for very different reasons in a seminary from at a college. I argue that, therefore, different strategies are appropriate, even necessary. College students, though they may think they should get religious instruction, actually need to be gathering information and knowledge in a dispassionate and empathetic manner, whereas the very nature of seminary training involves religious instruction and enculturation. Therefore I argue that seminaries should not only teach non-Christian religions, but should actively seek non-Christian scholar-practitioners to teach those religions. I will argue that because Christianity is being represented by advocate-insiders, other religions should also be represented in such a manner, both to ensure accurate representation of the other religions and because examples of non-Christian scholar-practitioners will be very helpful to the seminary student.

Such a position requires, first, the recognition that world religions should be taught at all, which is still a moot point in some seminaries. In this context, I will not summarize very briefly arguments I have made in other contexts.[10] I would only point out the reality that the world in which the minister-in-training will be serving is a religiously diverse world; her congregants will have non-Christian neighbors, coworkers, friends, and, in all likelihood, relatives as the rate of intermarriage increases. What does a pastor who is untrained in world

religions say when a congregant needs to talk about his son or daughter's upcoming marriage to a Muslim or a Hindu?

More important, seminary is the place where the vicious circle of religious chauvinism perpetuated from generation to generation can most effectively be broken. The students I encounter in college classrooms learn their attitudes toward non-Christian religions from prior religious instruction, including instruction from their churches and pastors. If churches commonly spread the message that religious pluralism is not a problem, cultural attitudes about religious diversity would change. Seminaries are the logical place to initiate this transition; those who teach in church congregations learn what to teach at seminary.

But why the unusual argument that non-Christian scholar-practitioners of various other religions would be the ideal candidates for such positions? What's wrong with committed Christians who are trained in comparative religions teaching these courses? Well, nothing, really. I often debate this issue with my close colleague, Terry Muck, a Christian who teaches world religions at a seminary. He contends that seminarians need to see the example of committed Christians who appreciate other religions. I agree, but I would reply that they should see that modeled by all their professors and that if they see it modeled only by their world religions professor, that example weakens rather than strengthens the claim that religious diversity is something positive rather than being a problem to be overcome.

I also argue that in a religiously plural world, seminarians need to see and interact with non-Christians, especially as their mentors, to learn the skills they will need to work in that world. If all the students and all the faculty, even the people who teach world religions, are Christians, the seminary becomes an enclave unto itself that does not resemble the real world. A religiously diverse faculty would mirror the real world to seminary students. And the example of their religiously diverse mentors working together and engaging in dialogue and other cooperative ventures would model to students how religiously committed people can work together and support each other even though their religious affiliations and commitments are different.

Additionally, though outsiders can be very knowledgeable about a religious tradition and even present it with great empathy, there are some nuances at the heart of a religion that are very difficult for an outsider to represent, again because of the link between experience and knowledge. For example, no matter how much I learn about Islam, I cannot represent the delight and comfort a Muslim finds in Islamic practices; I simply do not have the experience to do so. As a

Buddhist, I want Christian seminarians to experience directly the delight I feel in Buddhism.

Furthermore, for seminary students the experience of working with and learning from someone who *chooses* not to be Christian is important. Seminarians need the challenge of learning Buddhism, for example, from someone who could be a Christian but has chosen to be a Buddhist instead, rather than from someone who is impeccably trained in Buddhist studies but still chooses to be a Christian. Learning Buddhism from a Christian comforts and reassures seminary students that Buddhism *could not* be as attractive and salvific as Christianity. I would argue that seminary students, more than anyone else, need to experience firsthand an intelligent, well-trained person who knows all the options and yet has chosen something other than Christianity. For example, when I have talked to Terry Muck's class on Buddhism, it was my impression that the students found me irritating and challenging in a way they did not find him. Some of them even tried to debate the validity of Buddhism with me, something I doubt they would do with a professor who knows Buddhism but chooses Christianity. Buddhism presents much less existential challenge in such a case. By facing up to this challenge of learning Buddhism from a Buddhist, seminarians may even learn something about Christianity they would be unlikely to learn from their Christian professors. If the seminary student were to "lose faith" because of such an encounter—well, it was not a very well-established faith to begin with. The seminary should be the last place where people can protect their fledgling religious convictions by never being challenged with the options and alternatives.

CONCLUSIONS

Promoting scholar-insiders to teach their traditions in universities and seminaries is not actually my primary goal. It is the most *effective* method to promote my primary goals. In this particular situation of Christian religious hegemony and Enlightenment views about objectivity in the study of religion, scholar-insiders could challenge the complacency of students (and scholars) who think their ways of studying and teaching religion are sufficient, and tease and tickle them into intriguing insights into religion and religions. Furthermore, in a world in which learning how to understand and appreciate other religions and religious diversity is no longer a luxury, representing the various religions accurately and empathetically is necessary. Scholar-insiders are well equipped to do that critical task. However, I am not

advocating that scholar-insiders now become the new norm, replacing detached scholars dedicated to the values of the European Enlightenment. If the former were the norm, I would probably be arguing that too many scholar-insiders spoil our ability to gain fresh perspectives on religion. But in the current academic milieu, non-Christian scholar-insiders need advocates because detached scholars own the academic marketplace for college and university teaching and Christians own the academic marketplace for seminary teaching.

So far, so good. But what about the question of Jews teaching the New Testament in a seminary, for example? Why not regard such a practice as inappropriate, given everything I have said in this essay? Why not sympathize with my Christian colleague who recoils at the idea of Jews teaching the New Testament? Because in a culture in which Christianity is the dominant religion, this relatively uncommon practice also promotes the basic goals of pedagogy in religious studies that I have advocated in this paper: empathy for non-Christian religions, appreciation of religious diversity, and defusing religious chauvinism. A seminary student has plenty of opportunities to study the New Testament with Christians but very few opportunities to study it with a Jew or any other non-Christian. The perspectives learned in such an educational opportunity could well be unique. It could well benefit seminarians to learn the New Testament from a Jewish professor. Seminarians could profit from understanding how outsiders see Christianity and why they do not find it convincing.

Furthermore, I am speaking to the very specific situation of current North American demographics. The Christian majority, like any other majority, needs to do several things. First, it needs to know about other religions. Second, it needs some experience of learning about these religions from non-Christian scholar-practitioners of these religions; this will help them taste how convincing these religions can be. Third, it needs to hear about Christianity from non-Christian perspectives. A non-Christian scholar-practitioner of some other religion is probably better equipped for all these tasks *in a dominantly Christian environment*. Who has hegemony and what promotes appreciation of religious pluralism and diversity are always the key questions, not, in every case, the identity of the teacher or scholar. Rather, the *fit* between the scholar-teacher and the particular characteristics of the educational situation at hand should be the primary consideration.

Therefore the same claims about different identities should be made in situations where other religions are dominant. These claims are appropriate about any religious majority anywhere. In a culture in which Buddhism was dominant, I would have to make many of the

same arguments in reverse, and I would. In a largely Buddhist environment, there is no need to argue for the appropriateness of Buddhist scholar-practitioners as teachers, because they will be present. Rather, one would want to argue that students would learn a lot from the presence and work of some non-Buddhists teaching both Buddhism and other religious perspectives. Therefore, in my own specific Buddhist denomination, I often find myself arguing that people need to be more interested in other forms of Buddhism and in non-Buddhist religions, for exactly the same reasons that I have argued throughout this paper that Buddhist scholar-practitioners and scholar-practitioners of other religions should be more evident in the classrooms of universities and seminaries of a largely Christian environment.

To put it in a nutshell: insiders are good teachers for outsiders, and insiders always need to be willing to learn more, both about themselves and the other, from outsiders. Insiders talking to other insiders, whether they are believers in enlightenment rationality or in some traditional religion, will probably always be a major method for the communication of knowledge. But important learning occurs when insiders from one perspective are willing to study with and learn from the insiders of another perspective. And in the complex world in which we live, we are all sometimes insiders and sometimes outsiders, so we have plenty of opportunities for both kinds of learning situation.

NOTES

1. For fuller discussions of the issue, see Rita M. Gross, "Why Me: Reflections of a Wisconsin Farm Girl Who Became a Buddhist Theologian When She Grew Up," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 13:2 (Fall 1997): 103–118; *Buddhism after Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1993), 305–317; and *Feminism and Religion: An Introduction* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 5–28.
2. For a challenge to this position and my response, see Kathryn Young, "Having Your Cake and Eating It Too," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67:1 (March 1999): 167–184; and Rita M. Gross, "A Rose by another Name," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 67:1 (March 1999): 185–194.
3. For an example of such reflection, see Roger Jackson and John Makransky, eds., *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars* (Surrey, UK: Curzon, 2000).
4. Rita M. Gross, "Feminist Theology: Religiously Plural Neighborhood or Christian Ghetto?" Opening Statement and Concluding Reflections, Round Table Discussion, *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 16:2 (Fall 2000): 73–78, 124–131; "Feminist Theology as Theology of Religions," in *Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*, ed. Susan Frank Parsons (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 60–78.
5. I am aware of the difficult problem concerning what a scholar does with supposedly secret information that cannot, in good conscience, be published in public sources. Discussing that issue is not possible in this context. But I have found that such

knowledge has at least two scholarly uses; it helps one understand exoteric aspects of the tradition more fully, and it is very useful in evaluating the scholarship of others who purport to understand these esoteric matters.

6. Rita M. Gross, "The Virtues and Joys of the Comparative Mirror," *Boston University School of Theology Focus* (Fall 1999): 9–16.
7. Gross, *Feminism and Religion: An Introduction*, 13.
8. For some classic statements, see John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite, eds., *Christianity and Other Religions* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980); Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes toward the World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985); and James B. Wiggens, *In Praise of Religious Diversity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996).
9. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Other People's Myths* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 18.
10. Rita M. Gross, "The Virtues and Joys of the Comparative Mirror."

7

BALANCING ACTS: NEGOTIATING THE ETHICS OF SCHOLARSHIP AND IDENTITY

Tazim R. Kassam

INTRODUCTION

Steep is the price to be paid for a life of scholarship and teaching in academe. I learned this in a terrifying way with the publication of my study of the religious songs called *Ginans* of the South Asian Ismaili Muslims. This essay is a preliminary reflection on my experiences. In a way that mirrors the uncertain movement of social conditions and personal desires both obvious and hidden, it explores how I came to work on this community and struggles to understand why my work received the reception that it did. A central focus of this volume is to investigate how the specifics of one's identity (race, gender, class, religious, and political affiliation, and so on) affect one's work as a scholar of religion. In what follows, it will become transparent why some kinds of scholarship cannot be independent of a scholar's identity. As such, the essay will try to show what is at stake when the multiple positions of intellectual inquiry, critical consciousness, communal identity, religious affiliation, and the myriad ethical imperatives of inherited and acquired identities make equal and often competing claims on oneself and one's scholarship. The essay will interweave autobiographical details of my story primarily to raise issues of relevance to the ethics of scholarship and identity.

Let me briefly describe what happened, sufficient only to explore the key themes. Titled *Songs of Wisdom and Circles of Dance: Hymns of the*

Ismaili Muslim Saint, Pir Shams (State University of New York Press, 1995), my book introduces, translates, and analyzes a sizable collection of hymns called Ginans attributed to an Ismaili Muslim saint. Ismailis are a branch of the Shi'a Muslim sect of Islam.[1] The Ginans were composed by *pirs* or preacher-poets in vernacular Indian languages between the eleventh and eighteenth centuries, and they express the teachings of the Ismaili interpretation of Islam through symbols, myths, and religious concepts familiar to and prevalent within the Indic milieu. They still form a vibrant and living tradition of devotional songs and continue to be lovingly recited by South Asian Ismailis today during their daily ritual prayers. What could possibly have been less controversial than a study of religious hymns shaped by the ecumenical Bhakti and Sufi contexts of South Asia, where devotional music offered aesthetic, creative, and constructive avenues for cultural critique, religious exchange, and social harmony? Obviously I had much to learn about the political contexts within which scholars write and the extent to which they can predict, let alone control, the ramifications of their writing.

In any case, attempts were made to prevent the publication of my book. When that failed, attempts were made to prevent its distribution and sale. I received death threats that were sent to me via the publisher, State University of New York (SUNY) Press. Even before I had laid my hands on a copy of my own book, a person who called himself "Dr." went to the main office of SUNY Press in Albany.[2] Claiming to be an official representative of the Ismaili Muslim community, he warned that if the book was distributed and sold, it would result in a Salman Rushdie affair. The press took the threat seriously and contacted the FBI. Meanwhile, members of the executive committees of the American Academy of Religion and the Middle Eastern Studies Association, and other international Islamic scholars were apprised of the unfolding situation, and they came to my defense and my right to academic freedom. Although the ultimate outcome was that the book was released after the "Dr." was investigated and both his academic credentials and his claims to be speaking on behalf of the Ismaili community were shown to be suspect, the episode exacted a dear price in multiple areas of my life.

Needless to say, the experience itself and its aftermath were traumatic. The consequences were severe and manifold, including failure to get tenure, temporary exile from a community, and psychological and physical suffering. I have struggled for years over whether or not to make this story public. I could not think of where and how I might begin to tell it. Which part of it? How much of it? And what of the fear factor, the constant worries about the unpredictable repercussions of

speaking out? Not surprisingly, I hit a wall each time I tried to write this essay. I thought to myself, "Why stir the pot? Better to leave the past alone!" One wants to forget in hopes that forgetting will make not just the pain and perceived injustice but the tensions and conditions that created the crisis in the first place go away. However, I could not help but muse over a bumper sticker that warned, "Your silence will not protect you." I still struggle with how to strike the right balance between silence and disclosure.

My decision to remain silent immediately after the book's publication was motivated in large part by the concern to protect the Ismaili community from any negative publicity. Putting the spotlight on a minority viewpoint held by a few individuals would unfairly tar the reputation of the whole community that has been for centuries rather vulnerable within the Muslim world. But this self-imposed silence to safeguard a community that I cherish and love resulted in personal harm; opportunists filled it with accusations and the silence adversely affected my scholarship. Since the publication of my book, I have been afraid to write about this extraordinary devotional tradition, thus fulfilling the wish of those few who wanted to erase my work on the subject in the first place. Learning of my experience has also discouraged younger, talented Ismaili scholars from specializing on Ginans. Having prevaricated and agonized for many years, I have finally decided it is time to take the risk and write about this experience because of what Edith Wyschogrod beautifully describes as the "ethics of remembering."[3]

Why did my book provoke such a reaction? Had I anticipated it, would I have published my study? Is it possible or even desirable to do scholarship on a subject that is sacred to or perhaps contentious within a community? What are the ramifications? While I had some inkling that Ginans were being deemphasized by key leaders in the Ismaili hierarchy to relativize them within the broader framework of Ismaili literatures and devotional traditions, it came to me as a complete surprise that the move to suppress my work originated from the very individuals who I thought would truly welcome the study because it boldly attempts to give the Ginans and Indian Ismaili traditions, which have been ignored or dismissed in orientalist scholarship on Ismailism, their due place within Ismaili history.

The welcoming reception that I expected the book to receive from the Ismaili community never came (although, mercifully, since its publication many Ismailis who have read the book have personally expressed to me their gratitude and appreciation). Leaders within the Ismaili national councils in the U.S. and Canada at the time were

contacted about the threats and harassing calls I received, but they distanced themselves from the situation and issued a letter stating they had no comment on the book. The American Academy of Religion contacted members of the board of governors at the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London, which trains graduates and sponsors research and publications on Shi'a and Ismaili Islam. One or two wrote letters in support of my academic freedom, while others objected to my work since it had not been vetted by the institute. As an Ismaili scholar, there were expectations that I would first submit my work for internal review by community authorities before publication.

To suppress the controversy and to eliminate further debate that might create divisions in the Ismaili community, my book was not allowed, on the orders of the highest-ranking religious education coordinator, to be sold at the community's literature desks nor placed in its libraries. Individuals who had not even read the book circulated rumors calling into question my integrity both as a scholar and as an Ismaili, and they made dire predictions for those who might read it. That I was judged without proper investigation of various allegations nor given an opportunity to discuss the contents of my book shocked and distressed me all the more because when this happened, I had established my reputation and credibility in the North American Ismaili community, having served for many years on national religious education boards within its voluntary institutional framework. It is no exaggeration to state that without the active lobbying efforts of the executive boards of academic organizations such as the American Academy of Religion and the Middle Eastern Studies Association, my book would not have seen the light of day and my academic career would have ended.

The purpose of this essay is not to reconstruct in detail events whose memory continues to cause pain. Nor is it to assign blame and level accusations. Rather, it is to consider thoughtfully and with the necessary detachment that comes with time the many factors that came together to create the storm (at least in my life). It is to search for the genuinely sincere motivations that lay behind the actions, however harmful, imprudent, or misunderstood they appeared to be, of the various actors in this drama including myself. I speculate that perhaps at that historical moment in the mid-nineties, in a rapidly altering social, economic, and political climate for Ismailis worldwide, my book served as a lightning rod. It got caught between different currents and interests within and beyond the Ismaili community that converged and created friction, uncertainty, and anxiety. I open my reflections on the balancing acts involved in negotiating the ethics of scholarship

and identity with the above story to illustrate that not only is it possible to be silenced by what one writes, but it is possible to be punished for one's writing even when it is done with the best of intentions. Writing involves unpredictable risks.

DEFINING THE KEY QUESTIONS

On the premise that all discourses are situated and shaped by subjectivities, I have been asked by the editors of this volume to examine three issues in particular and as they relate to one another. First, do the specifics of one's identity have any relevance to one's scholarship? What bearing, if any, do the facts that I am a woman of South Asian background, a member of the Shi'a Ismaili Muslim community, a part of the Indian diaspora from East Africa, the granddaughter of Indian merchants who left British India to seek their livelihood in colonial Kenya have on my scholarship?

Second, does any particular facet of one's identity, for example, one's race, gender, religious affiliation, or sexual orientation, give one's scholarship some kind of epistemological privilege? Am I, indeed, even aware of the assumptions, biases, and desires inscribed on the body itself that inform my scholarship? Do I know how being an Ismaili Muslim woman has influenced my understanding of feminism and gender in Islam or how my Gujerati Ismaili Muslim roots have affected my approach to the wider Islamic tradition? In turn, how have these specific locations enhanced and/or limited my understanding?

Third, to what kinds of ethical concerns do such questions of identity and scholarship give rise? If it is the case that historically speaking, the voices of women and minority groups have been underprivileged, should these marginalized voices be given special attention? If, moreover, dominant groups have given distorted views of minority cultures, should only minorities be allowed to speak for themselves? Do scholars who belong to minority groups have a special responsibility to represent them? As an Ismaili Muslim woman scholar, am I obliged to draw attention to or bring forward voices of Muslim women, who have been silenced, or Muslim minority groups, including that of my own, whose traditions have been concealed for fear of persecution? What are the ramifications of engaging in such representational discourses? How does one's scholarship thus get entangled in the minefield of identity politics and the knowledge/power imbalances that characterize "cross-gazes that various cultures manufacture of one another across space and time, whether synchronically or diachronically?"[4]

These are serious questions that I will be able to explore only modestly in the following pages.

IDENTITY AS MULTIPLE AND COMPLEX

What factors are relevant in determining identity, and how are they interrelated? Are all of them equal? Are some factors dominant at different times in one's life? Is the importance of one element over the other a personal decision or beyond one's knowing? How do inherited and acquired features of identity interact? What role does scholarly training play in constructing (and/or reconstructing) personal and social identity? These questions show that the very concept of identity is indeterminate and fraught with problems. Modern notions of identity have a history located in different theoretical, social, and political contexts. Within the contexts of religion, nationhood, and legal discourses, identity often tends to be construed in discrete and static terms. When identity is reified as singular and eternal, there is little room for theorizing its plurality, fluidity, and complexity. Speaking about the self as well as society in terms of rigid identity constructs runs the risk of failing to appreciate the dynamic, kaleidoscopic, and even fragmentary nature of identity formation. This is particularly true in contemporary times, which have seen unprecedented changes on a global scale; but it also holds true for premodern societies that enjoyed periods of relative stability. So while I use the term "identity," I do so knowing that it means little devoid of the specificity of time, place, and the altering relationships that constitute the self in society. Personal identity, like cultural or group identity, is not necessarily static. Much talk about identity that make claims from it tries to fix it, whereas in reality, many features of identity alter throughout an individual's or society's lifetime.

Furthermore, individuals are made up of multiple selves that are interdependent or in conflict. Hence at some points in my life I have wanted to escape one or another of the identities I inherited, whereas at other points I have wanted to rediscover and own these "roots." That questions of identity demand a measure of oversimplification can be illustrated by narrating the difficulty from a personal standpoint. I am invariably tongue-tied by the question: "Where are you from?" "Which part of me?" I silently consider. Is it the religious part of me that identifies with the Muslim world? The racial and ethnic part of me whose origin is South Asian? The childhood part of me that was born and raised in East Africa? Or the intellectual, scholarly part of me that was fostered in Canada and the United States? This highlights the fact that

multiple identities demand a capacity both to acknowledge and negotiate similarity and difference. Bohra Ismailis and Khoja Ismailis are both Shi'a Muslim communities but have different interpretations and traditions; South Asians are immigrants but their experiences are not necessarily commensurate with those of other immigrants to North America; Gujeratis and Punjabis share a common geographic and cultural background but are distinct in their language, religious affiliations, and communal organization. How one deals individually with these simultaneous if discrete identities has implications for how groups might be able to handle them at a wider level as a society. For displaced peoples, including migrants and refugees, it can be very fragmenting to move between different knowledge worlds, cultural worlds, and social worlds, and harder still to find a unifying and coherent sense of self.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

To explore how my identities have shaped my scholarship, it is necessary to speak autobiographically. In so doing, I am conscious of writing vulnerably and forsaking what Ruth Behar aptly describes as "the mantle of omniscience."[5] In the process of reconstructing these memories, I am also acutely aware of selectively inscribing a tradition to explore the specific issues of this essay. I was born in Kenya to a mother (Laila) whose family hailed from Kathiawad and spoke Gujerati and a father (Rahim) whose family came from Kutchh and spoke Kutchhi. My mother's parents lived in Kisumu on the shores of Lake Victoria, and my father's family lived in Mombasa on the shores of the Indian Ocean. Both grandfathers (Huzurmukhi Mawji Esmail Jivraj and Count Kassam Jivraj) were traders and merchants. My paternal and maternal families had migrated from Western India at the beginning of the twentieth century in dhows that ferried Indian laborers between British India and British East Africa. Born in Kenya, my parents grew up in colonial times and were educated in English-medium Aga Khan schools influenced by British models of education. Whereas memories of India (*Bharat*) exerted powerful filial and cultural ties to places left behind by my Kathiawadi and Kutchhi grandparents, their Kenyan-born descendants were involved in creating traditions in a new homeland as they adapted to and embraced life in East Africa.

I grew up in Nairobi, Kenya's capital and former colonial headquarters of the British. My childhood recollections are embodied in sounds, sights, and smells that evoke memories of a racially, religiously, and culturally diverse even if sometimes segregated and class-stratified ethos.

Mombasa recalls the mouthwatering aromas of Arab *halva* and *kahawa*, Kisumu, the scent of Indian spices and sweets, and Nairobi, the smell of British doughnuts and scones. In my childhood imagination, I roamed with my maternal grandfather in the forests of Ayodhya with Ram and Sita just as easily as I played with Enid Blyton's *Famous Five on a Treasure Island.*

My earliest recollection of a place from which my sense of community, identity, and belonging evolved was the Ismaili *jamatkhana* (lit. place of congregation; prayer hall). With the exception of meals and bedtime, no routine was more constant in our family than washing up, getting dressed, and attending religious services daily at sunrise and sunset in the *jamatkhana*. In this space filled with smoky, fragrant incense, the devotional singing of Ginans, the celebration of Eid ul-Fitr and Imamat Day, the offerings of fruit and spicy dishes, and brightly colored saris, topis, and shawls, I caught on to threads of the places I was from. My forebears had been Hindus who had converted to Satpanth Ismailism many centuries ago in India; I belonged to the Khoja Ismaili Muslim community, which had its own multiracial schools and hospitals and whose spiritual leader was Hazir Imam, known to the public as His Highness Prince Karim Aga Khan IV. I learned from the *farmans* (lit. decrees, guidance) of Hazir Imam read out daily in *jamatkhanas* that the two most important goals in life for me were to practice my faith regularly and to get an education. My parents were very active in *jamatkhana* and served for several years as *mukhi* and *mukhiani*, voluntary officials appointed by the Aga Khan through his councils to lead daily religious services.

Life changed suddenly when dictator General Idi Amin expelled the Asians from Uganda in 1972. Talk spread about the violence and killing. Although no one thought the unrest would spread to Kenya, most Asians in East Africa were afraid. Many Indian families had relatives living in Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya. A few years before the unrest, a very close friend of my father, Nurdin Hassanali Sajan, his wife, and two little sons had been hacked to pieces with *pangas* (scythes) and machetes in their home on the outskirts of Nairobi. I still vividly recall the funeral. Frightened, I sat beside my father as he recited prayers in front of the four bodies, whose faces were slashed beyond recognition.

This tragedy greatly affected my father and created concerns about our future in Kenya. In 1973, leaving behind our unsold flat, furniture, and beloved dog, we left Kenya for good. The departure was sudden. We had to leave immediately after receiving approval for Canadian immigration. We packed a few suitcases and left for Canada via London. It

was a traumatic journey. Helpless and frightened, I will never forget watching my father struggling with our heavy suitcases at Earl's Court Station in London, nor my mother slipping on ice and hurting her back during our first frigid winter in Toronto. Everything was so strange and unsettling. During my junior year at high school, I was unable to speak a word. What got my family through the challenges, humiliations, and worries that most immigrants inevitably face was the makeshift Ismaili *jamatkhana*. It was an anchor in a sea of change. Ismailis from Kenya, Uganda, Madagascar, and Tanzania converged there to pray and drew from each other and the guidance of their spiritual leader the strength and courage yet again, within a single generation after settling in East Africa, to make a new life in Canada.

For diasporic and migrant communities, the idea of homeland is complex and changes with each successive generation. First-generation immigrants possess vivid visceral memories of their homelands from whence they derive their sense of place. This theme of emigration, of leaving home, of performing many *hijra* (lit. migration), has become a central motif in my own life and religious and intellectual formation. Leaving home and returning home to find one's roots and recover one's sense of place is a process common to people who live in diaspora. Having gone through many such periods of migration and resettlement, the Ismailis have a remarkable historical tradition of adapting, changing, and renewing themselves. This very resilience, however, also has the potential of rejecting and even erasing a past perceived rightly or wrongly to be a hindrance to meeting the future, as I was painfully to discover through the controversy over my book.

We were not expelled from Kenya and were, in fact, deeply attached to the beautiful country, its people, and ways of life. Rather, we emigrated out of fear and to escape a potentially dangerous situation. Like the Ugandan refugees, my parents left behind their key assets. They were not well-to-do and worked hard to make ends meet in Canada. Their uncompromisingly clear and steadfast goal was to make sure that their children received an education, and they supported us to this end even though my sister and I chose to get PhDs in the humanities instead of more lucrative and status-commanding degrees in law or medicine. Apart from being an Ismaili, the most important factor in the adolescent formation of my "identity" was my education. It was emphasized continuously in the *jamatkhana* and in my home. Given my own inclinations, next to my faith and family nothing mattered more to me than reading, learning, excelling at school. I followed my sister Zayn to McGill University in Montreal, Canada, and that step resulted in profound changes. Whereas before attending university, my

identity was defined solely by my community, higher education and an academic career gradually broke the hold of that sheltered, circumscribed outlook. This was the first step toward what led to learning Hindustani vocal classical music in India, doing research on the Ginans, publishing the book, and facing its aftermath. During that precarious process of intellectual and creative search, I had to learn to transcend the limitations, interests, and consolations of familiar ties and loyalties and to develop a critical consciousness not only of my own history but of contemporary times.

In all this, it would be remiss not to mention gender. My sense of possibilities in terms of what I could do in life was rooted in my mother's example and the participation of women in the *jamatkhana*. Ismaili women lead prayers; they officiate at religious ceremonies; they pray and serve alongside men. I did not grow up with the gender-based practices of segregation and veiling that are observed in many other Muslim and South Asian communities. It was both permissible and expected that Ismaili women would compete with men in studies, sports, artistic pursuits, academics, business, and leadership. This independence, however, did not mean license. A clear sense of propriety and respect was expected in all social interactions: men were "brothers" or "uncles" and women were "sisters" and "aunties." Ismaili women have enjoyed considerable choice and opportunity since the time of the third Aga Khan, H.H. Sultan Muhammad Shah, who told his female followers in the early part of the twentieth century to get rid of the veil, to educate themselves, to become financially independent, and to participate fully in the religious, social, cultural, and economic life of the community. That said, just as systemic patriarchal norms and practices continue to constrain women even in advanced western democracies, attitudes have yet to change before Ismaili women attain the highest-ranking and powerful positions of leadership within the Ismaili community.

WHY I CHOSE TO STUDY GINANS

The point of this autobiographical background is to show how I came to study the Ginans. As a child, I remember exchanges my own family had with people of other faiths during key religious holidays and festivals. We visited Hindu friends with *mithai* during Diwali, Muslim friends with *halwa* during Eid, and Christian friends with cakes during Christmas. They were Goan, Gujerati, Punjabi, Swahili, Kikuyu. What did it matter to the child? The *mithai wala* (delicatessen) and local bakeries did good business; we ate a lot of sweets and played with our

friends. As children, we had fun celebrating so many festivals, each with its own unique expression. This diversity reflected an ethos of embracing differences that is much harder to find in the United States especially. When we first arrived in Canada, I remember having the same feeling on Canada Day in Toronto, when diverse communities came out in their own dress, served ethnic foods, and danced and sang their traditional songs. Some may regard this commonwealth sensibility of multiculturalism as orientalism dramatized, as a way of othering the other, but my experience calls into question this critique. On the contrary, I have found that growing up expecting and respecting the distinctiveness of other communities has not just been an immensely enriching experience, but a constructive ethical stance.

What made me want to study the Ginan literature is the fact that I needed to understand the community to which I belonged and to make sense of its religious life and history. The loss of a fairly sheltered community environment in Kenya and the experience of migration brought to the foreground questions of belonging, as did learning about the wider Western and Islamic worlds. So to some extent questions about identity initiated my scholarly career. I wanted to work on the Ginans in particular because I observed the solace and inspiration that this devotional tradition gave to the community in diaspora, the way it helped the community to find some continuity and direction amidst extraordinary changes, and the supportive psychological and social role that the ritual context of the *jamatkhana* played in the life of the transplanted community.

Although I was initially enrolled in the sciences at McGill University to become a medical doctor, I altered my plans and decided to pursue a degree in philosophy and the history of religions after hearing a *talika* (letter) from the Aga Khan IV to his worldwide *jamats* in 1977. He announced the establishment of the Institute of Ismaili Studies in London and expressed the need for Ismaili scholars who could read primary sources and contribute to the study of Islam in general and Ismailism in particular. While I would like to say that my choice of career and intellectual journey was an independent decision, the truth is that a number of external factors also played a role. Diaspora experiences tend to do this—you want to find out who you are and where you came from and why you have this heritage that plays such a formative and powerful role in your life. Yet in doing so, in asking a simple question such as where does one come from, one alters the self in ways never imagined. It is never a simple movement into history but a movement into the future by way of the past seen through the exigencies of the present.

My interest in philosophy and religions developed at a very young age. Even before entering university, I had begun to read widely. The academic study of religions initially prompted a period of confusion and discomfort, a state that I now recognize as an important intellectual transition in my own students' encounter with the study of religion(s) as constituted within academic discourse. I had to learn to step outside my own tradition, which I was willing to do, but I barely recognized what I thought was my own faith and culture as it was represented in scholarly writings. Some of this "misrecognition," to use Charles Taylor's term, had to do with orientalist approaches to Islam in general, and some with prejudices against the Shi'a and Muslims of non-Arab cultures. I could understand in practical terms Taylor's thesis concerning the real harm caused by lack of recognition and acts of misrecognition. He says, "The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves."[6]

Many European and American scholars of Islam uncritically repeated distorted representations of the Ismailis that they found in the literatures of the latter's enemies. For centuries, Ismailis have been maligned in Sunni and some Shi'a writings as heretics and persecuted for political and theological reasons. European travelers amplified these prejudices with their own orientalist myths of the Assassins. My impression as an Ismaili was the exact opposite of such violent and scandalous images. In fact, I thought Ismailis were pacifists and went the extra mile to establish good relations and maintain harmony with other groups. This is not an unusual survival strategy of persecuted minorities. Growing up, I was happy to be an Ismaili. I had gone to Aga Khan schools that were multiracial and religiously pluralistic. Our *jamatkhanas* were places of prayer, social and cultural activity, and civic leadership. My father's good-natured ecumenical predisposition epitomized the broad-minded tolerance captured in the phrase, "God is too big to fit into one religion."

Hence not until I read polemical writings of other Muslim groups attacking the Ismailis for being un-Islamic, given the influence of so-called non-Islamic ideas in their traditions, and scholarly academic works affirming such dubious notions of "impurity" and "innovation" would it have occurred to me to question my "Muslimness" because the Ginans were in Gujarati and had a polyglot of words in them such as *guru, pir, sat, ilm, samsara*, and *qiyamat*. Symbols drawn from different religious traditions seemed to cohere within a framework that,

as I argued in my book, allowed for generous tolerance, respect, and coexistence of common spiritual and ethical ideals. The "accusations" that Satpanth Ismailis accepted Hindu teachings (or that the Fatimids drew on Greek thought, or that the Aga Khan's followers were too Europeanized, and variations thereof) astonished and angered me because, though I might not have been able to articulate this at the time, I vaguely recognized that these criticisms were a tacit rejection of the very notion of pluralism and creativity within Islamic traditions.

At first, the very question, namely, how could symbols and concepts drawn from the Hindu and Muslim milieu cohere together, made no sense to me. It seemed perfectly natural to be tucked in with bedtime stories, to hear episodes of the Ramayana from my grandfather, and to be woken up by my father reciting the daily Arabic *du'a* in Qur'anic cadences. These colorful threads coexisted de facto in a harmonious, integral way, so why did I have to choose between them and give up one for the other? As a result of this exposure to multiple traditions, I found the ethos of religious fundamentalisms, certain reductionist forms of identity politics, and the ideologies of modern "isms" (nationalism, capitalism, globalism, etc.) to be oppressive, rigid, and suffocating.

When I began my work on Ginans, I was primarily interested in the poetry, ritual, and aesthetics of religious life. Ginan recitations were not restricted to *jamatkhanas.* There used to be Ginan *mushairas* or *mehfils* (concerts) at people's homes and during festivals and celebrations. When I lived in Kenya, every other weekend we seemed to be at music parties or Ginan *mushairas,* since my father was a widely sought-after singer. Ginan cassettes were played in the car and at home. At picnics, we would sing Geets, Gayans, and Garbis (inspired by Gujarati folk songs with devotional content), and play *dandia raas* (stick dance) or perform the *garba* dance in a circle. This singing and music formed a kind of security blanket that kept us warm, nourished, and happy, especially in our new adopted lands, and provided emotional reminders of a common bond. As the daughter of a famous Ginan singer and a lover of music, I was also drawn to this devotional poetry (and to the Sant tradition in India as a whole) because of its simultaneous tolerance and humorous critique of outward forms of religious practice. There were Ginans that debunked the straitjacketed Muslim *mullah* as well as the puritanical Hindu *pandit* yet preached *bhakti* or devotion to a God whose name, Ram or Raheman, did not matter but who heard and responded to hymns from the heart. Beyond the music and poetry, I was interested in how the Satpanth Ismaili tradition had articulated and shaped the daily religious life, everyday ethics, and social exchanges of South Asian Ismailis.

As a graduate student, I confess that I had little interest in analyzing issues of power, politics, and privilege, that is, the "hermeneutics of suspicion" class of questions that have become integral to (and in many instances mandatory for) academic discourse. One of the risks we take when we begin our intellectual journeys, however, is that we cannot anticipate where they will eventually lead. I wonder when my work on poetry and music slid into the politics of knowledge. As I got deeper into the translation and analysis of the Ginans, I began to recognize that they held memories the meanings of which I could find only by thinking about history, power, and the stakes of identity. To make a long story short, these devotional poems themselves led me to acknowledge Foucault's insights that all discourses are embedded in power relations.

My journey began with a scholarship to go to India to study languages and Indian classical music. I loved to sing and took lessons in Indian classical vocal music with the renowned vocalist Dr. Prabha Atre, hoping also to understand the musical structure of the Ginans. At the same time, I worked on my Hindi while translating a long Ginan treatise on meditation called *Brahma Prakash.* I researched the history of the Ginans, including how and why they came to be composed in the form they did. The basic theory then in circulation was that the Ginans were composed by Ismaili *pirs,* or spiritual guides, to teach Ismailism to Hindus, and hence utilized many indigenous ideas to convey their message. This led me to think a lot about conversion and identity. It seemed insufficient to me that religious incentives alone could account for conversion. Ultimately, I argued in my book that many factors, including social and political interests and alliances, came together to make affiliation with Satpanth Ismailism an appealing choice.

But the question of identity remained. Questions as to whether the Ginans were essentially Ismailism in Hindu disguise or Hinduism overlayed with Ismaili Muslim ideas were problematic because they were premised on ahistorical, essentialist, and insular conceptions of religious identity. Moreover, both assertions aimed to make a political point. I argued that the hybridity and syncretism (words that I use with positive connotations) of the Ginan literature demonstrated the unique creativity of Ismaili traditions that have over the centuries evolved out of each new historical and cultural context in which the Ismailis found themselves. Put succinctly, the Ginans illustrate a success story of selective adaptation and innovation of an Arabo-Persian heritage within the South Asian milieu. In fact, my book makes the case that had the Ismailis not thus revitalized themselves with distinctively local features and alliances during this Indic period, their very survival would have been in jeopardy, given the sustained attempts by other Muslims to wipe them out. Questions

of identity that argue for authenticity on the basis of idealized notions of purity largely ignore these shifting dynamics of identity and the reality that they are shaped by historical forces, and are locally constituted in response to and within specific socioeconomic, cultural, and political conditions.

WORKING ON ONE'S OWN COMMUNITY

My work on the Satpanth Ismailis thus forced me to think about issues that have broader relevance, including the challenges of religious pluralism, the permeability of religious boundaries, and the ethics of scholarship on a marginalized community. The problems that I dealt with in the Ismaili case, namely, appreciating local Islams (often described and delegitimized as heterodoxies), exist more broadly in understanding the Islamic world. I felt an ethical obligation to highlight a Muslim tradition that was considered peripheral, if not un-Islamic, within the orientalist scholarship of Islam, the normative Sunnicentric Islamic tradition, and, to some extent, within Ismaili studies as well. In the following pages, I will consider the stakes of working on the sacred writings of one's own community.

Many questions can be raised with respect to studying the religious or sacred literature of one's own community. What are the ramifications of choosing one's own religious community as a subject of scholarly investigation? What are the advantages and disadvantages? What kinds of problems are inherent in this situation? Is it possible to be detached, critical, and balanced? Is one's interpretation likely to be biased or enriched by the status of being a participant-observer? What is gained and what is compromised? What are the scholar's obligations to the community whose sacred texts and artifacts she or he handles? How does one negotiate the tensions that arise from differing understandings of the literature? At the same time, how does it compromise the principles of critical scholarship to keep such concerns in mind? How does one balance the moral responsibility to a community with the ethics of scholarship?

The more I think about these questions, the more I struggle with the myriad ethical implications of studying whatever is held to be sacred by a community. Although scholars readily acknowledge that the very act of studying a group and its traditions may inadvertently leave an impact on and even interfere with the latter's development, the academic enterprise, founded as it is on original research to extend the frontiers of knowledge, presses forward. On the other hand, individuals and groups also play an active role in deciding the extent to which they

will absorb or reject external influences depending on whether or not they promote or serve their own interests. That is, the subjects of study also preserve their own degrees of agency, choice, and access.

LIMITS OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM

These questions are hardly new and have preoccupied humanists and social scientists for decades, but the stakes are considerably higher when one comes from the community under study. The unexpected reactions to my book impelled me to think further about the meaning of academic freedom. I understand academic freedom to mean the right to think independently, to ask critical questions freely, and to express the conclusions of one's investigations without fear of persecution and censorship. But is that too naïve and impractical? Does the right to free inquiry and free speech have any constraints? What conditions are required to sustain and protect these intellectual practices? As we know, the ideal of academic freedom is neither universal nor axiomatic. When one studies the history of the concept, one sees that it is not timeless; it was institutionalized after the Enlightenment for a variety of reasons. The notion of academic freedom depends on and is upheld by social, economic, and political supports that safeguard the modern university as an intellectual space that encourages diverse ideas to surface and to be debated, ideas that the public, state, or market may find distasteful, unacceptable, and threatening to its interests. As a legally constructed and socially maintained right, academic freedom needs to be continuously defended to protect those who wish to engage in research and critical inquiry from those whose interests might lead them to seek to interfere with the formers' pursuits.[7] Without these structures in place, freedom of speech and expression can be perilous.

Since one person's freedom may be unsettling to another person's predilections, academic freedom is a contentious construct. In practice, academic freedom and research are justified as an extension of knowledge irrespective of whether a group wants its practices, history, or literature to be known or critically examined. The ethical issues this poses are very delicate. For example, do we have a right, simply because we are scholars of religion, to study sacred traditions if they are only for initiates? Or, if revealing a community's practices could place them at risk for whatever reasons, should we write about them anyway? In addition to contributing to knowledge, scholars must publish their research in order to advance in their own careers, given the dictum "publish or perish!" Hence the uses that scholars make of sacred traditions are different from the uses that communities of faith make of them.

This leads to the question of how academic freedom might impinge on the subjects of study, especially since scholars are engaged in publication, representation, and dissemination of ideas. At the same time, it must be recognized that subjects under study also make their own choices about which scholars and publicists to court, assist, and allow access to their communities and traditions, and which to include. Can there really be such a thing, therefore, as "disinterested" scholarship, presumably one of the cornerstones of academic freedom? The impact of scholarship, moreover, may be impossible to anticipate. Should scholars be held responsible for reactions to their work and for how their books get used or misused? In a poignant piece titled "Once Your Words Are Published, Anyone Can Read Them—And That's the Problem," Regina Barreca speaks to the risks inherent in writing. She says: "We fling our words out into the universe, never knowing who will reach up and catch them . . . whether they will do harm or good. We are almost always blind and deaf to their effects. There is no such thing as a little essay or an innocuous piece of prose. Not as long as somebody reads it."[8]

CONFLICT OF AN INSIDER-OUTSIDER

What I am trying to highlight is the conflict that often comes into play when one occupies multiple identities and positions that entail different loyalties and obligations. As a scholar, I felt compelled to bring to light this devotional tradition and its history, especially given the fact that it has been either neglected or dismissed within Arabocentric occidental scholarship. But as a member of the Ismaili Muslim community, I was aware that the Ginans had been used by other religious groups in the Indian subcontinent and other parts of the Islamic world to accuse the Ismailis of being infidels (*kafirs*) and to persecute them. Ismailis would hence have good reasons to keep them secret. Still, as a scholar, it seemed to me that this secrecy would in turn fuel more speculations and fabrications, and reinforce distorted claims about the nature of the Ginans and Ismaili religious traditions by failing to challenge the very assumptions imbedded in claims of "true" Islam.

This situation illustrates how different positions within oneself come to clash: on the one hand, a legitimate quest for intellectual inquiry, and on the other, a legitimate need for self-protection. As a scholar with multiple loyalties, coming to terms with these in-between, liminal spaces can be a source of tremendous anxiety. Gloria Anzaldua aptly describes it as "life in the borderlands." One must separate from the "mother" culture but at the same time contend with being on the margins within the dominant culture. So where is one's place? Anzaldua notes: "The ability

to respond is what is meant by responsibility, yet our cultures take away our ability to act—shackles us in the name of protection. Blocked, immobilized, we can't move forward, can't move backward. . . . We do not engage fully. We do not make full use of our faculties. We abnegate." Indeed, with the reaction to my book, I found myself in the following situation: "Petrified, she can't respond, her face caught between *los intersticios*, the spaces between the different worlds she inhabits."[9]

To make vivid that sense of being caught between worlds, it may be helpful to recall the still petrifying story of how a prepublication copy of my book reached the hands of individuals who first demanded that I withdraw it from the publisher and then threatened me when I did not. The same year that the book was to be released, I had begun a new project funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities for which I had to interview traditional preachers and singers within the Ismaili community who were skilled in the language, recitation, and interpretation of Ginans. One of my first interviews was scheduled in Vancouver with a famous preacher in the community whose passionate sermons had earned him a mixed reputation. The best way to describe that encounter is to give an excerpt from my journal:

> January 6, 1995, Vancouver. I'm shaking to my bones in fright. What exactly happened today? I'm in total shock. "Dr." picked me up and dropped me off at Mr. Z's. I walked into the living room and on the coffee table was my book. Yes, my book! Here I am, the author, I haven't yet seen my book, and he has my book on his coffee table. What is going on? How did he get it? Why is it here? Questions burn my brain. I felt fear slowly crawl up my spine. Something was terribly wrong. He went to make tea. No one else was around. While he was in the kitchen, I picked up my book and found it all marked up. He sat down and launched into his tirade. Why had I not consulted him before getting it published? Didn't I know that he was the expert on Ginans? . . . I was not to be allowed to have my book published and sold. It went on like this the entire day. I wanted desperately to get out of there. Where was "Dr?" . . . Finally, around 5:00 PM, "Dr." came. . . . I am frantic. I can't think straight. What am I to do? First, how did Z get hold of my book? It can only have been directly through the publisher. How did he manage that? Obviously, I can ditch my plan to write about his career as a preacher and his knowledge of Ginans. But I don't think he'll let go of me. And exactly what is his relationship with "Dr?" Did "Dr." know he had my book? Did "Dr." get the book for Z? Did he know about this inquisition? . . . O God! I come up for tenure this fall. What's this going to mean? What if these guys create enough problems so that the book gets delayed, destroyed, or even plain withdrawn from publication? There goes my career. Why? Why is this happening? I can't believe this. My very first book! I want to celebrate the occasion with my family, enjoy a few moments of pride and accomplishment, but here I am in utter despair, terrified, absolutely terrified.

Recovering from this traumatic episode has taken many years. My immediate response was to determine as best I could how to protect my academic freedom. When I politely refused to withdraw the book from publication, stating that I had signed a contract, the man threatened to raise funds to buy the lot and destroy them. Since I did not capitulate, as I mentioned earlier, pressure was applied directly on the publisher by "Dr." not to release the book. I had to hire a lawyer. Scholars around the world wrote letters in defense of my academic freedom. The book survived and was released. That same year, I came up for my tenure review at an elite liberal arts college. Department colleagues and senior administrators were aware of the problem. I was unanimously recommended for tenure with promotion to associate professor by my department, but the college committee overturned the decision. I was denied tenure. Many have speculated about the relationship between this denial of tenure and the controversy over my book. As an untenured colleague said to me, academic freedom does not exist for those without tenure even if they are part of academe. Did this controversy and the threat of a Salman Rushdie affair mark me as too much of an institutional liability to grant tenure? Did Mr. Z or "Dr." interfere with my tenure process? Would a more conservative, mainstream, male Islamic scholar have been preferable? One will never know.

Ironically, the very protections of academic freedom that tenure is meant to offer at the critical moment were denied to me. I learned that the values of academic freedom are upheld arbitrarily and only when it is expedient to do so. I was too young, afraid, and defenseless then to challenge the decision. First, I cringed at the thought of the publicity. Moreover, as a South Asian woman from a little-known Muslim community, a Canadian émigré from East Africa, and a recently minted PhD only just initiated into the academy, what chances did I have to win an appeal or lawsuit? I had hardly been able to marshal the resources—emotional, physical, and financial—to fight for my book, let alone my job. So my status as insider-outsider put me in a susceptible position both within the community and outside it for entirely different reasons. This ought to give pause to those who assume or argue that scholars who belong to the religious communities about which they write enjoy special privileges and immunity, as well as to those who believe that academe fully protects their right to academic freedom.

WHY GINANS WERE CONTENTIOUS

It is true, though, that as an Ismaili I had an insider's privilege of access to primary sources to conduct academic work on the Ginans. This is significant because this sacred literature was kept secret for centuries

by the Satpanth Ismailis on the Indian subcontinent. One of the earliest *pirs* (preacher, poet-saint) who composed the Ginans developed a unique script called Khojki to record the songs, a script known only among the few literate religious-specialist families of Khoja Ismailis. To appreciate their need for secrecy, one needs to know the history of the Ismailis. Among minority Shi'a groups, Ismailis have been one of the most persecuted and maligned sects within Islam. Like other Shi'a Muslims oppressed at various times by the Sunni majorities, for many centuries they had to practice *taqiyya,* or dissimulation, to hide their true identity as a way of protecting themselves in hostile environments. The Ginans were hence part of a historical tradition of assimilation and concealment and a strategy for survival in the face of adverse circumstances. For centuries, not only was a special script known only to its members devised for its written transmission, but the performance and oral transmission of the Ginans were confined within the community. Access to this body of literature, especially original manuscripts, continues to be restricted. Hence, for the most part, scholars who have done research and published on the Ginans have been Ismailis. From an academic standpoint, therefore, the first advantage of being a participant within a tradition is simply one of having access, even if it is tightly controlled access, to the sacred texts and religious practices of a community.

Given this experience of being a minority under attack at various times in various places, Ismailis have learned to be self-protective, circumspect, and politically astute. They are particularly careful for both ethical and practical reasons not to offend or provoke others. Under these circumstances, to be an Ismaili scholar who examines and writes about religious texts, practices, or institutions from a historical-critical perspective can be fraught with problems. A broader parallel might be seen in terms of Muslim scholars who must come to terms with the feelings of those Muslims who resist any form of self-disclosure, critique, or introspection, especially in a climate where the dominant culture is already Islamophobic and intolerant of Muslims. Indeed, the issue of representation that Muslims face in hostile environments where they live as minorities is the very issue that I sought to tackle with Ismailis living as a minority within the Islamic world and the Indian subcontinent. The scholar is thus in an impossible situation catalyzing a state of "anxious subjectivities" (an expression coined by the editors of this volume): on the one hand wanting to speak up for the minority or marginalized community, but on the other hand, in the very act of doing so, bringing it under unwanted scrutiny. Ironically, my desire to give voice to the Ginan

tradition, to uncover suppressed discourses within Ismaili studies, and to arrest the forgetting and erasing of this literary corpus provoked a reaction from individuals within the community who had the highest stake in protecting it.

In my book, I have analyzed the many reasons why Ginans have been a source of controversy for Ismailis in the last couple of centuries. I will not review them here, but a key factor has been the struggle to claim their legitimacy as a Muslim community. The Islamic world, like the Christian tradition, has its own brand of orthodoxy and normative discourses that have tried to crush out diversity of practice and interpretation. In retrospect, as I try to make sense of events, I think my book inadvertently acted as a lightning rod for a number of conflicting developments that were taking place within the community at the time. I have described a childhood of racial and religious pluralism, the experience of diaspora, and questions about multiple identities that helped shape my decision to research the Ginans. This search for a complex, inclusive, and historically rich notion of identity was occurring at a much wider level for the global Ismaili community. How do groups who have been displaced, who live in diaspora, who have lost their ancestral homes create the stability and anchor that land, kinship, and culture give? The experience of displacement puts immense pressures on newly settled immigrant communities. Many construct imaginary homelands from their feelings of having no land, no home, and no place of their own. First-generation immigrants particularly face this anxiety of being in diaspora—neither here nor there—and cling to old habits and customs for consolation.

How would the Ismailis get through this delicate transitional phase? How would they move from a sense of displacement to a sense of belonging? It is impossible to answer this question without recognizing the pivotal role played by H. H. the Aga Khan IV, the Imam or spiritual leader of the Ismailis, who gave them explicit *firmans,* or guidance, to "make Canada your home" or "make USA your home," and to contribute to their adopted home as good citizens. His pragmatic guidance may be summarized as follows: hold to your religious traditions and practices; draw principles from the faith of Islam to face life's challenges; educate yourselves and adopt habits of lifelong learning; go into various professions; recognize that Western society is meritocratic; set the highest standards for excellence; emphasize voluntary service and family values; stay united and help each other; live ethically. In addition, the Imam established an Ismaili constitution and created an extensive network of institutions with a younger generation of leaders around the world to manage this accelerated process of

change. In fact, since the early sixties, in anticipation of the major migrations and dislocations that his far-flung communities would face, the Aga Khan IV has been in the process of creating a global, transnational religious identity for the Ismailis.

What is pertinent to this discussion is that in North America, Ismailis from different cultural and geographic backgrounds came to settle down as immigrants. In the first wave of immigration, Ismailis shared fairly uniform traditions from South Asia, whether they were East African Ismailis or came directly from the Indian subcontinent. Ismailis whose roots were in the Indian subcontinent were aware of the existence of other Ismaili communities in Hunza, Badakshan, Syria, Iran, Afghanistan, Central Asia, and China, but exposure to and specific knowledge about these communities was limited to the Imam of the time and a few of his immediate advisors who stayed in touch with emissaries from these different regions. In the fifties and sixties, Ismailis from Hunza and Badakshan living in the Northern Territories in Pakistan traveled to cities such as Karachi, and their own intellectual and cultural traditions began to emerge. By the late eighties, as the gridlock between the U.S. and former Soviet Union unraveled at the end of the Cold War, the dispersed but sizable Ismaili communities who had been living in isolation and/or *taqiyya* (self-concealment) in Central Asia and the former Soviet Union began to surface. Conflicts in the region resulted in significant numbers of refugees from Afghanistan and Tajikistan. A large proportion of Afghan refugees went to Pakistan and India and small numbers resettled in Canada and East Africa. These Ismailis had their own languages, ethnicities, cultures, oral traditions, and Arabo-Persian or Central-Asian literary heritage. The South Asian Ismailis were enjoined by their imam with the responsibility to welcome and assist their sister communities, whom they were encountering in a sustained manner for the first time. One of the most critical issues facing the Ismaili community as a whole, therefore, was how to define an identity that embraced and celebrated ethnically, culturally, and geographically diverse communities. The challenge was to ensure that this plurality of Ismaili tradition—a plurality that mirrors the diversity within the larger Islamic world—did not fall prey to essentialist types of identity politics that could splinter the community.[10]

Led by the efforts of the Aga Khan at multiple levels, Ismaili identity was hence being reimagined as a frontierless faith defined by a humanitarian ethic of service and a respect for pluralism both within Islam and Ismailism. At the very time, therefore, that the leadership of the community was in the process of articulating an Ismaili identity that

would unite and transcend the diverse ethnicities and cultural streams within it, my book was published. Moreover, it gave prominence to Satpanth or Indian Ismailism, the very tradition that was being repositioned alongside the Arabo-Persian and Central-Asian Ismaili heritage. My book argued for attention to this tradition at a time when religious education institutions within the community were trying to minimize and subsume it within the larger context of a diverse literary heritage. The incremental moves by the Ismaili leadership toward making room for the Arabo-Persian and Central-Asian traditions, which were less familiar to Ismailis from the Indian subcontinent, were perceived as a threat to the status quo of South Asian Ismailis who were anchored by the ritual and cultural ethos symbolized by the Ginans.

In the fear that the Ginan tradition would be compromised and displaced, there have been numerous internal debates in the past few decades between leaders and preachers over its status. The latter insisted on establishing the sacrosanct status of Ginans composed by the *pirs* over and above other inherited traditions. The works of other Ismaili scholars, which questioned the authenticity of Ginans, exacerbated these tensions.[11] It is not difficult to comprehend the fear and loss felt by those Ismailis whose faith was shaped by the language of the Ginans. Hence even though my work came out of the desire to bring due attention to this devotional tradition, it was pigeonholed with other scholarly works that had undermined its sacred status. Like these other scholarly writings on Ginans, it too appeared to pose a challenge to the traditional authority of preachers and preservers of the Ginans within the community. At the same time, by making a powerful case to preserve and critically appreciate the significance of the Ginans, my work went contrary to some trends in the community to curb their dominance in ritual practices. Inadvertently, my book was primed to upset interests competing at many levels.

THE SCHOLAR'S ROLE AS AN INTELLECTUAL

This illustrates the hazards of studying sacred texts whose status is contested and undergoing change. Obviously, not all Ismaili scholars agree on the history, interpretation, and relative significance of the Ginans. For instance, I am highly skeptical of attempts to invalidate the Ginans wholesale by casting doubt on their authorship and authenticity. Yet this position has been influential in training a new cohort of teachers and preachers within the community because it fits

the wider move to reinscribe the Ginan's status as merely one among several Ismaili traditions of "devotional poetry" rather than as "sacred literature." This underscores the vital question of how the writings and authority of academic scholars not only affect but also effect changes within a community vis-à-vis its scriptures and practices. Initially, Ismaili scholars who published on Ginans received a mixed reception within the community for rendering religious texts objects of academic study and scrutiny and for subjecting myths of the *pirs* that supported and sustained the authority of the tradition to historical-critical investigation.

Notably, several Ismaili women scholars who worked on Ginans in the last century were sidelined within Ismaili institutional structures, whereas male scholars who subsequently worked on Ginans have been able to assume or hold onto influential positions by also pursuing other interests. Ismaili women scholars who worked on Arabic and Persian Ismaili sources have received more recognition and opportunity. In other words, the rebalancing of attention to the multiple historical traditions within Ismailism in the last few decades has not only subdued the Satpanth Ismaili tradition but also marked those who specialize in it. To avoid this fate, as I mentioned previously, some Ismaili scholars entering the field have decided not to specialize in Ginans and Indian Ismailism. Things are changing quickly, however, as efforts have been made in the last decade to introduce academic materials and methods of analysis into the traditional frameworks of preaching and religious education in the Ismaili community. Moreover, as the wider goal of repositioning the latter within Ismaili history and literature is achieved within the community, and as the community feels more secure in itself within the Islamic world, I expect that there will be renewed interest in Ginans and Indian Ismailism and increasing support for research and publication on the subject.

This leads to the wider question of the role and position of scholars and intellectuals within their own communities. Does it mean that if one is a Muslim, one must be an uncritical advocate of all that goes by the name of Islam or that one must accept what is given or passed down without question? Every generation reinvents its traditions to suit its present needs and is thus highly vested in them. In a sense, history-writing reflects what present generations want future ones to recall about the past. To analyze social constructions of history, the scholar must stay a step removed from such reinventions. Critical reflection, however, is not necessarily motivated by the will to harm or destroy; it may seek to offer a deeper, more deliberate way to think

through issues of justice and the politics of knowledge in this historical moment. The role of the intellectual, quoting Edward Said's famous phrase, is to speak the truth to power. The intellectual's place, he argues, is "to raise embarrassing questions, to confront dogma and orthodoxy . . . to represent all those peoples and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug."[12] Such unremitting honesty requires courage equal to the task of facing the consequences.

Said dismisses as reprehensible those "habits of mind in the intellectual that induce avoidance" (Said, 100) of controversial issues, but the consequences of thus interrogating one's culture can be dire. Many groups, especially minorities, regard critique, dissent, and questioning of authority as betrayal. In close-knit communities, the penalty for critical and analytical discourses may be rejection and exile. Scholarship not sanctioned by community structures may be perceived as a transgression, its penetrating nature as invasive and dangerous. As an insider one is subject to charges of being a traitor, charges that an outsider may not have to face. Describing the anxiety and dread associated with such disclosure, Anzaldua says, "We're afraid of being abandoned by the mother, the culture, la Raza, for being unacceptable, faulty, damaged. Most of us unconsciously believe that if we reveal this unacceptable aspect of the self, our mother/culture/race will totally reject us. To avoid rejection, some of us conform to the values of the culture, push the unacceptable parts into the shadows" (Anzaldua, 20). The only way to stand apart from one's culture is if one feels "competent enough on the outside and secure enough on the inside to live life on my own" (Anzaldua, 21).

Attaining such independence, however, is not always desirable, because being an insider-outsider makes returning home unbearable. How does one return to a place where many aspects of newly fashioned selves are no longer comprehensible? My journey as a scholar in search of the historical roots of my childhood ultimately reconfigured and transformed my sense of identity. At its best, education frees the mind to ask questions about the taken-for-granted. These freedoms to experiment, to investigate, and to think radically can be liberating; at the same time they cast one into exile for calling things into question. The loci of identity begin to shift. Some anchors persist while others give way to new loyalties. Undoubtedly, scholarship and academic life have changed me. The process of forging an intellectual life has a major impact on notions of the self.

In these pages, although I have labored to impose a narrative on my experience, to make it "work," in fact, the work of becoming is still in progress. As I have tried to illustrate, identity is ideally never a settled

matter. Arguably, the most vibrant identities at personal and societal levels are dynamic, contextual, and constantly negotiated and interrogated. Reductive forms of identity politics often emerge from desperate attempts to find a one-size-fits-all solution to real or perceived threats to the self. But individuals and communities do not have to embrace the notion of either/or and to assume that they must operate within a totalizing, essentialist framework or run the risk of falling into a radically destabilizing and fragmentary one. Identities that are secure tend to be multidimensional, complex, and resilient, so that in times of radical change, aspects that help adapt to those circumstances get asserted. The ideal of *e pluribus unum* applies as much to the individual as to society. We have many tongues in our hearts, some of which we do not ourselves know. As Julia Kristeva explores in *Strangers to Ourselves*,[13] delving into the memory of history and culture may make us embark on a path to recognition of the strangers yet to be discovered within ourselves. In a very practical sense, keeping alive the plurality of multiple selves, approaching them as unique and fascinating, is a survival strategy both for individuals and communities.

CONCLUSION

Ironically, my work was trying to show the creativity and inventiveness of the Satpanth Ismaili Muslim tradition within the context of South Asia. The multivalence of symbols in the Ginans drawn from Indic and Perso-Arabic sources served the nascent Ismaili community in South Asia not only as a fount of inspiration and divine knowledge but also as a strategy of survival and renewal, resilience and adaptation, in that historical encounter over eight centuries ago. To forget this legacy out of fear, deliberately to neglect it, and to silence works such as mine is to concede victory to those who want to whitewash diverse Islamic societies of the elements they have absorbed and synthesized from many cultures. It is also to fail to resist ideological notions of religious life. The consequence of marginalizing such areas of research is to let them die out of sheer neglect. Is there not a moral imperative to tell the stories of those whom scholarship has ignored and whose communities might, even for legitimate reasons, want to suppress, forget, or erase?

When I published the book, I not only thought that I was making a contribution to scholarship but also felt I was giving something back to the beloved community that shaped me. I began my scholarly career full of hopes and aspirations to foster appreciation of this tradition and to preserve what was being submerged or denied. For

that effort to have been so misunderstood and attacked has caused me terrible pain. Add to this pain of misrecognition the failure to appreciate what it takes to work against immense odds to establish a position in academe. If the disapproval of my work had remained at a personal and even intracommunal level, it would have been one thing; but the action of a few individuals; emboldened by the tacit acceptance of their acts by the encouragement of one or two key leaders and the silence of other leaders who were unsure of how to respond; exacted serious and tangible consequences in terms of my professional career and physical health. For months, I lived in terror; for years, I forced myself into the type of silence that is professional suicide for a scholar. I have not been able to write a word on the Ginans since my book was published. How often I have regretted that decision taken many years ago, when the future looked promising and bright, to pursue an academic career; regretted that impulse to explore the riches of humanity through the kaleidoscopic history of my own community.

To believe that, however, would be the worst betrayal of all. In her introduction to *"Coming to Writing" and Other Essays*, Susan Suleiman reflects on what Hélène Cixous means by getting past and breaking down "walls" and "daring to throw off the constraints, inner and outer, which join together to 'forbid [one] to write.'"[14] It is ethically imperative to speak up and to break free of the tyranny of fear and the crippling silence that keeps one petrified, paralyzed, and subject to the control of others. It is necessary to take responsibility for defining oneself, to help the community of both scholars and believers to see the complexity of these issues, to open up spaces for unthinkable questions, and to encourage those in similar predicaments to take heart. It is time to heed Cixous's hopeful call to come back to writing: "Writing: a way of leaving no space for death, of pushing back forgetfulness, of never letting oneself be surprised by the abyss. Of never becoming resigned, consoled; never turning over in bed to face the wall and drift asleep again as if nothing had happened; as if nothing could happen" (Cixous, 3).

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge several people whose encouragement brought this essay to fruition. First, I wish to thank Sheila Davaney for her patience, persistence, and conviction that I had something to say on scholarship and identity. Second, I am indebted to my sister Zayn Kassam for reviewing my initial drafts and remaining firm in her support over the course of a long and excruciating journey. Third, I wish

to thank colleagues and friends who generously read the essay and provided insightful and critical comments: Linda Alcoff, Ann Gold, Karim H. Karim, Leslie Bender, Carol Babiracki, Katherine Young, Linda Barnes, and Jim Watts. Needless to say, all errors and deficiencies are my own.

NOTES

1. In common with all Muslims, Shi'ites believe in the Qur'an as divine revelation and in the inspiring example (*sunnah*) of the Prophet Muhammad's life. They differ from the Sunni followers of Islam in regard to religious leadership of the Muslim community after Muhammad. Shi'a communities believe that Muhammad designated his cousin and son-in-law to be his legitimate successor. They uphold the doctrine that the first Imam, Hazrat Ali, and his direct descendants were the authoritative and divinely guided interpreters of the Qur'an and living guides for each successive generation of Muslims. The Ismailis are the only Shi'a Muslim sect with a living Imam. The Aga Khan IV is the forty-ninth descendant of Alid Imams. For in-depth discussions of the origin and development of Shi'a and Ismaili Islam, see Wilfred Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and Farhad Daftary, *The Ismailis: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
2. For obvious reasons, names of specific individuals cannot be disclosed. After investigation, it was determined that this individual had acquired a PhD degree from an unaccredited institution or diploma mill. At the time, the individual concerned was employed by the Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Board of Canada but has since been relieved of his duties.
3. Edith Wyschogrod, *An Ethics of Remembering: History, Heterology, and the Nameless Others* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
4. Jackie Assayag and Véronique Bénéï, eds., *At Home in Diaspora: South Asian Scholars and the West* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 3.
5. Ruth Behar, *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 12.
6. Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and the "Politics of Recognition,"* ed. and introduced by Amy Gutmann with commentary by K. Anthony Appiah, Jürgen Habermas, Steven C. Rockefeller, Michael Walzer, and Susan Wolf (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25.
7. For a discussion, see Louis Menand, ed., *The Future of Academic Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
8. Regina Barreca, "Once Your Words Are Published, Anyone Can Read Them—And That's the Problem," *Chronicle of Higher Education* (November 12, 1999), B8.
9. Gloria Anzaldua, *Borderlands: La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 20–21; hereafter cited in text.
10. I am grateful to Linda Alcoff for drawing my attention to the distinction between reductionist formulations of identity-based politics and nuanced positions that defend the epistemic, pragmatic, and real-world effects of identity. See "Who's Afraid of Identity Politics?" in *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*, ed. Paula Moya and Michael Hames-Garcia (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
11. For example, see Ali Asani, *The Bujh Niranjan: An Ismaili Mystical Poem* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Middle Eastern Center, 1991).

12. Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 11; hereafter cited in text.
13. Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).
14. Susan Rubin Suleiman, introductory essay in Hélène Cixous, *"Coming to Writing" and Other Essays,* ed. Deborah Jenson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), ix; hereafter cited in text.

8

POST-HOLOCAUST JEWISH IDENTITY AND THE ACADEMY: ON TRAVELING THE DIASPORA AND THE EXPERIENCE OF THE DOUBLE STANDARD

Marc H. Ellis

It is a fascinating and troubling experience for post-Holocaust Jews who are religious and self-critical to find themselves in a dual struggle for survival. The first struggle is within the Jewish community, where critical thought related to Judaism and Jewish life—especially with regard to Israel and the Palestinians but also encompassing spiritual journeys that move within and outside normative Judaism—are frowned upon or even prohibited. The second is within the larger academic community, where Jews are typically denied the expansive terrain that scholars of Christian background take for granted. The Jewish scholar hence experiences a solitude, because one's natural constituency and adoptive community both see that person as suspect or out of place.

This is the double bind of post-Holocaust Jewish intellectual life. It is less a question of privilege, ideology, or extrascholarly identity that troubles these engaged Jews. Rather, it is a struggle to survive the double solitude and the lack of support—or even concern—for a tradition that has often been demonized or romanticized, but rarely engaged. The scholarly role is of less importance here because the struggle waged is for an entire history. Just as Christian scholarship has in many cases served as a thinly veiled parallel church, where innovative

theology and spirituality can be explored relatively free of church authority and parishioners' needs, engaged Jewish thought seeks a similar safe haven and caring community in which the future of Jewish life can be thought through. This harbor is denied to the dissident community, as imposed parameters on intellectual inquiry and religious commitment become the controlling standard channeling access to identity.

On the central questions of contemporary Jewish life, including and especially the question of the displacement and oppression of Palestinians from Palestine—a process that is becoming permanent with the sealing of the borders of an expanded Israel and a ghettoized and fragmented Palestinian autonomy under Oslo and the final status negotiations—there is little room for dissent. The academic community does not welcome those who oppose publicly and continually this tragic end to Palestine *and* the Jewish tradition as we have known and inherited it. Here I refer to Jewish seminaries, university religious studies departments, and Christian seminaries of all denominations. There is no will for this struggle among Jewish leadership in the academy or outside it; the study of religion finds this largely irrelevant or dangerous. Christian seminaries are simply not interested in it.[1]

Like black theology, feminist theology, and committed liberation theologies across the globe, Jewish theology cannot afford an abstract stance toward identity and the academy. The Jewish need for an engagement that holds nothing back comes at a time when other engaged community theologies are reflecting back on their insurgency and questioning their next steps. They are engaged in broadening their base and vision at precisely the time that Jews are finding their tradition systematically stripped of its covenantal and ethical bases. Hence Jews who assert an ethical basis for their identity and insist upon it in critical thought and religious expression find their identity as Jews stripped of legitimacy. The concern of the academy is to move on to a more reflective arena, but those Jews who prioritize reflection and community are absent from the discussion because of either academic discrimination or willing neglect. For many African-American, feminist, Native American, and Latino scholars, Jews are invisible or too visible, too quiet or too loud.[2]

At the end, there is time to begin again. This essay seeks to enter the discussion of scholarship, identity, and the academy from an autobiographical perspective, raising aspects of a post-Holocaust journey in dialogue with the issues that confront Jews and Judaism. A second-tiered reflection on the academy is then entered as a way of posing the double bind many Jewish intellectuals face. Finally, a challenge for

Jewish inclusion in the broader tradition of faith and struggle is issued. This challenge will be difficult to respond to in the affirmative. This difficulty is of course not insurmountable; it is, though, distant and costly. Perhaps it would also be freeing. At stake is the integrity of the religious search as a truly ecumenical adventure in the twenty-first century.

IDENTITY AND BOUNDARY-CROSSING IN POST-HOLOCAUST JEWISH LIFE: A PERSONAL JOURNEY

It is telling that the term "worship" has meant little to me, even to the point of being off-putting. Perhaps it is the formality of the term or simply the way "worship" entered my life: through Hebrew school at too young an age and in a foreign language and through Christian church advertisements on billboards and signs in front of imposing and, yes, foreign, church structures.

For whatever reasons—and no doubt there were many of them—official synagogue and church ritual has always struck me in the wrong way. It is as if God was boxed within a service where the seasons of religious life were known in advance and the order of prayer was in some way the order of God. I thought this way as a child when I tried to escape the rigors of Hebrew school and Shabbat services to play sports and read. I wanted the open air, to breathe and run with others, to read words of history and imagination, to be free.

And then came the Holocaust—not the event itself, for this had occurred and ended before I was born, but the naming of the Holocaust as an event of significance and horror.[3] What did this event say to the order of worship, to the buildings and leadership where God was invoked with an unthinking regularity? If God had chosen us as Jews, if God had promised to be with us in our struggle for liberation and in our suffering, where was God in Auschwitz? And if indeed Jesus was the savior, the redeemer of all humanity, and if Jesus had a special gift of being with those who were suffering, healing them of their wounds and brokenness, where was Jesus, himself a Jew, at this moment of loss? And where were those who followed him as their salvation? In Europe, at least, so many Christians were involved in the horrors of anti-Semitism or were silent in the face of it.

The language of God was too easy to speak, at least from my perspective. And yet I was drawn to those who were religious, preferring their company to overtly secular people. Religious orthodoxy lacked the freedom and the questioning I needed to find my way; secular orthodoxy struck me in a similar manner. A certainty of denial paralleled the certainty of belief, and I abjured both.

For many years I remained between the religious and secular, or perhaps I combined the two. Most of my public life is an articulation of my personal journey, the search for a space and a language, a freedom, if you will, to speak of God and humanity with integrity after the Holocaust. I cannot find my way as a Jew only or a non-Jew only, or even as a Jew and Christian only. I need to listen to the voices of fidelity in every language, culture, and religion that I encounter. For me, fidelity, or the struggle to be faithful, is the key to spirituality. When the doors of worship were closed to me, the struggle to be faithful spoke to me. It is the key that unlocks the doors that often enclose religious language and ritual.

It was at the Catholic Worker in New York City that I first experienced Christian worship. As a community that lives and works among the poor and raises its voice in critique of a social order that produces poverty, Catholic Worker members gather for worship in the dining room where during the day they serve meals to the hungry. The setting is austere: the community gathers around the tables where the men and women of the Bowery eat their food, amidst the pots and pans in which the meals are cooked. No prayers are said before these meals, nor is religious instruction provided or demanded. The only prayers are at Mass, which everyone who wants to can attend.[4]

I remember sitting at the back of the room listening to the priest welcome the congregation and then solemnly begin the Mass. The community was diverse and included those who volunteered at the Worker and those affiliated with it from the neighborhood. Often people from the breadline were present, sometimes as communicants, other times interrupting the Mass in need of food or clothing. Occasionally, a brick would be thrown through the window or a person from the street, friendly when sober, would arrive drunk and angry, ready to dispute, at the most inopportune time, the words of consecration.

It was here that I met Dorothy Day, the founder of the Catholic Worker, and Daniel Berrigan, the radical Catholic priest who then and now continues to present a radical vision of God and the social order. For Day and Berrigan, as for others who gathered at the Worker, worship was prayer in the very heart of their work and struggle. The dining area is cleaned before the service in the same way the room is cleaned before serving meals. It remains as it is for the work or, if you will, the life lived during the day. No separation is allowed or desired. Liturgy emerges and flows with a committed life lived out in the world.

Life here is difficult for everyone, and living at the Worker for a year was the most difficult time of my life. Witnessing suffering close-up,

without escape, and living in the context of poverty and destitution is not easy for a person from a middle-class background. I never became used to it, nor was I good at attending to the suffering. The smells and horror of some lives I encountered have never left me. Nor has the essential lesson I learned at the Worker. The poor and destitute are no different from the affluent, except in circumstance and possibility. There is a thin line between hope and despair, affluence and destitution.

When we pray in affluence, what do we pray for? Does the God who blesses us deny to the poor and destitute his blessing? Do the prayers of the poor counteract the prayers of the affluent? Are the affluent and the poor divided in life but united in God? Is it true that unity through Jesus overcomes the disunity among Christians in the world? Is salvation found in God or in the world? What is salvation? What does it mean here on earth? These questions remained with me as I embarked on a journey with the Maryknoll Fathers and Sisters and traveled the world among the poor and with liberation theologians who speak for the poor. Here I encountered again the worship of those on the outside of worldly power, those who were segregated into the precincts of the living dead. I often wondered in my travels and conversations in Latin America, Africa, and Asia whether those of the living dead were so different from those of my dead in the Holocaust.[5]

The echoes of Jewish life I found here were startling: a recovery of the Exodus and the Prophets, even the Jewishness of Jesus. Here God was among the poor, or at least this was the assertion of the theologians and the people themselves. Could it be that God is among the poor in the garbage dumps of Lima, Peru, but not among the Jews of Auschwitz? It could be that God is with both these Peruvians and the Jews. And it could be that God is among neither people, then or now.

For many years I remained in this question of God's presence, the question itself becoming all-determining. Yet I was also called to form a religious practice, perhaps because of my personality and perhaps because of the circles I traveled in. I was both an observer and a participant without knowing it, and my place in either dimension was unknown and, at the same time, deepening. At this time I made a decision to form a discipline that allowed these two dimensions of my life to coexist and come into a new configuration. The decision was neither rational nor irrational. I was not able to articulate or even define what this discipline might be. Traveling among others who were not my own, I also decided to travel to foreign territory within myself.

Like transporting oneself to a foreign country, the development of a discipline is dependent on the means of transportation available. For

me, the known vehicles were from my own Jewish tradition and from Asian spirituality, especially Zen Buddhism, which I was introduced to in my university days. Though known in learning, they were still foreign in the sense that visiting another country is different from reading about it.

Thus I began with Shabbat and Zen. On Friday nights I read with my family the Shabbat prayers; each morning I sat in silence. The two practices are seemingly disparate in the extreme. The first speaks of God's creation and the covenant at Sinai. The second is the attempt to enter the self to experience nothingness. Still, both helped me to appreciate the historical and internal landscape of the world in a different way. The questions remained; the colors of life changed.

I could not have embarked on Shabbat if I held to a rigorous honesty. And even today, when my oldest child, Aaron, who now shares the invocation of the Shabbat blessings, asks if I believe all that we read, I admit my limitation. "Did God create the earth?" Aaron asked me some years ago. When I began a lecture on the complexity of the question he stopped me short. He informed me that a simple yes or no would do. I told him that I was unsure.

Did God choose the Jews? Does God accompany us through history? These are affirmations that I speak. The answers yet elude me. Still, I continued in the service until the affirmation of truth became less important than the questions the words raised. After more than two decades of Shabbat observance, certain passages of the service continue to provoke. Is it right to thank God for choosing us and setting us apart as a people? And what does "set apart" mean in our day, especially at a time when Jews are integrated into American life and, often as not, Christian friends share our Shabbat table? If Jews are set apart, can we also thank God for other times in history—at Auschwitz, for example? Does our sense of being chosen and set apart also allow some Jews to act against others—Palestinians, for example—in a manner that too closely resembles the ways others have acted against us?

For most people it is difficult to understand a religiosity that is unsure of itself, a faith shadowed with doubt and questions. Can a believer question the creation of the world as an act of God? As important is the affirmation of God's presence in the world, and who after the Holocaust can be certain of this presence? Often it is said that faith is a gift and those without that gift must simply struggle along. Yet even the biblical stories are full of doubt. Many other stories seem to lack a clear destination or have one that is difficult if not impossible to accept. Can I worship a God who tests Abraham's faith by his

willingness to sacrifice Isaac? A God who judges the ancient Israelites' fidelity with a reign of death?

I entered faith through doubt. Or perhaps I embarked on a practice that embraces doubt but refuses to be paralyzed by it. This provides the luxury of choosing aspects of the traditions and allows a critical attitude toward aspects of the biblical journey. Formative events for me occurred then and now, and Jewish religiosity is continuing to search history for acts of fidelity in history that inform my own desire to be faithful. Even on Shabbat then and now are in relation as creation and chosenness are confronted by suffering and Holocaust.

As I read the words of blessing, I also have in mind Palestinians who experience these words as hypocrisy and worse. For Palestinians, they are carriers of violence and exile. There are so many contradictions. Shabbat speaks of the end of exile. I experience Shabbat in the comfort of affluence and security. Does the hope of ending exile speak to those on the other side of powers that often invoke religious symbols to legitimate atrocity?

Doubt can be a critical element of faith, relativizing all claims, including our own. Silence enters here, at least in my own evolving practice. Sitting quietly and regularly is an opening without claims or doubt. Shabbat is an assertion, albeit a beautiful one, and the questions that Shabbat raises for me are speculative, no matter how deeply experienced. Zen seeks a reality beyond words and a presence to life without judgment or name. To reach this point is a lifetime's journey. The goal is itself an assertion of a destiny. Silence is a place of rest that refuses destination and destiny. To be here in the moment—to listen to what is inside us and be attentive to what surrounds us but not to be captive to it—is to practice a freedom. It connects me to the world in a different way from Shabbat. Perhaps they work in tandem, as voices of self-correction and as postures in the world. One is with words, the other without. One is with others, the other alone.

Still the questions remain. Often I am asked about fidelity as I have come to understand it. What is fidelity? To what or whom are we faithful? In an earlier time I responded that the call is to be faithful in and to history. Usually the person asking the question is religious in a more conventional sense. He or she *knows* that fidelity is to God and that the ability to be faithful comes from God. Hence my definition of fidelity is seen as either a challenge or as a superficial response to a deeper question.

After the Holocaust, with God, or at least the possibility of faith, in fragments, how can I posit a sure anchor from which answers, power, and strength flow? How can I assert a God that is whole and holy when

my experience is one of despair and waiting? If for Jews the Holocaust remains the ultimate shattering, a further shattering has occurred in response to the Holocaust—the formation and expansion of the state of Israel. To many the birth of Israel is a reformation of Jewish life. It asserts life where death reigned and holds open the possibility of the renewal of God's presence in the life of the people. And so it may be.

For many Jews, and I include myself here, the dispersion and oppression of the Palestinian people makes this view impossible to hold. Empowerment is necessary to maintain one's integrity and survival. It can be the place from which a new interdependence can grow. When a state is built on exclusivity and necessarily the exclusion of others, then isolation and militarism is the norm. Ingathering can become another form of shattering, and Jewish redemption from the Holocaust in the creation of a Jewish state becomes a disaster for Palestinians and for Jews as well.

I remember well the further shattering the recognition of injustice toward Palestinians caused for me. As I began to break through the difficulties of worship and move beyond a paralysis that needed assent before ritual, the most beautiful holiday of the Jewish year, Passover, became impossible for me. How can I celebrate our liberation when another people are enslaved? If applied to the entire world, the celebration would never be possible. However, here was a most specific case of direct Jewish responsibility being as directly evaded. Our fervent desire for liberation after the Holocaust is being perverted in the oppression of another people.[6]

Paralysis of belief and the inability to enter into another space so as to see religiosity from another perspective—for me the movement toward Shabbat and Zen—was different from what I experienced in the waning energy to celebrate Passover. Passover became impossible for me because the contradictions of real oppression were too great. It is precisely the other vantage point, the vantage point of the Palestinians, that brought Passover to an end.

Can fidelity be seen as a movement beyond the historical and within it, as a place from which to judge history in a critical manner? Shabbat and Zen make it possible to look at Passover and judge the community's assertion of liberation at the expense of another people's oppression. It at least asks a question of history from a vantage point that deepens as it becomes more experienced. Stated another way, the critical examination of Passover as liberation in our time becomes more articulate as an internal affirmation of spirituality identity is explored in more depth. Here again resolution is elusive. Contradiction is present as well. There is a choosing—Shabbat over Passover, for

example—that can be turned on its head. Why not celebrate both or abandon both as a point of consistency? Is one holy day exempt from critique while another deepens it?

Perhaps this is simply another aspect of the fragments of Jewish life after the Holocaust and Israel. Each Jew pieces life together in a particular and eclectic way. Boundaries are crossed and often intersect like an unplanned tapestry. It is untidy. The contours of the tapestry are uneven.

Identity can be the nexus for the formation of power; but it can also serve to promote resistance. In meeting with other Jews and those from different traditions who are also experiencing a fragmentary life, a sensibility emerges beyond the individual. One encounters a diaspora sensibility in more than a geographic sense or even the traditional Jewish sense of commonality within diversity. The diaspora encountered is a reality where the fragments of different traditions and lives come together in a new way. There is a particularity found among Jews in this new diaspora and a particularity that is evolving among the various other peoples living in diaspora. Jews, then, form a particular aspect of a larger community that is forming around a condition of exile and fragmentation experienced by many peoples. Jewish particularity in this evolving diaspora is in dialogue with two foundational realities. One is the Jewish world from which we come. The other is the broader community within which we find ourselves.[7]

I have found this to be true in my own life. It is almost as if I am traveling the diaspora, carrying with me my heritage and history and encountering other heritages and histories. The interaction is one of solidarity and confrontation. I am forced to expand my capacity for belief and action. I also become more focused on the interior life that is formed and unformed, affirmed and challenged in these encounters. Piecing together a post-Holocaust Jewish life is never static; traveling the diaspora is a spiritual vocation. Movement and inwardness coalesce to grant entry onto pathways in the search for meaning and identity.

However, there is still a need for an anchor, at least in my life. Exploration of fragmentation can lead to subsequent levels of dissociation, until the experience of fragmentation itself becomes defining. A fragmentation that is foundational is quite different from a fragmentation of a foundation, the former becoming less a search for wholeness and more an experience that has no place to return or journey toward. It originally had a place of depth from which it is jettisoned, and, however much desired, the ability to find meaning is no longer accessible. Hence the possibility of depth is lost as the resources from which it came recede into the distance. At some point even tradition

becomes inaccessible, while the impetus behind the quest for depth dissipates. Then a refusal to continue on the journey takes place. The inability either to see a journey or to perceive a destiny becomes overriding. Alternatively, in fear, the attempt to reembrace the foundational reality takes place without a necessary reconciling, as if the shattering had not occurred. Either journey will be fundamentally flawed and without meaningful resolution.

What pushes that movement forward? What propels the continuation of the journey into the unknown? What helps sustain the courage to continue to piece together the fragments after the Holocaust and Israel? What strengthens Jews to travel the diaspora without fear of losing their own identity or even the possibility of further shattering an already fragmented identity?

Looking back to the difficulties I have with worship and the subsequent creation of an admittedly eclectic discipline, what has been present since the beginning is the covenant. Not a whole covenant without question and doubt, nor even a covenant that can be named or found within one tradition. This covenant has accompanied me even as I searched for it. I often question where this covenant comes from, where it resides, by what name is it to be called. On Shabbat, I find it within the Jewish tradition. When I sit Zen, I find the covenant within silence. In Peru among the poor, I experience the covenant when God is called on to empower the people. When I think of Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement, the covenant is palpable. In the pictorial representation of Jesus on the breadlines among the poor, the covenant is invoked with an intensity that is haunting. Do I embrace the Jesus portrayed as a Christian? Or do I embrace the Jesus of the breadlines as a Jew?

In my own experience of traveling the diaspora, the covenant takes center stage as an almost unknowable yet intimate reality. At moments it is so close to me and yet just beyond me at the same time. It is the revealed covenant of the Bible. Yet it also evolves independently of its original revelation. For me the covenant holds forth possibility and engagement wherever people grapple with history at its deepest level. Rather than answers, the covenant embodies the questions and tensions of personal and communal life. It is not a place of rest but rather a calling forth, and thus carries its own legitimating identity for those who dare grapple with this complexity.

The covenant is multifaceted. It is experienced in different ways when approached from various perspectives. Shabbat and Zen become two vantage points of fragmentation and integration on the same path. The motion is forward, as if both point beyond themselves and

transcend their own particularity. Here the answer is less important, and truth ceases to be a primary objective. Does the covenant propose a truth? Or is it an accompanying inner voice without destination or destiny, except, perhaps, the destiny of the path itself? In the covenant, endings are beginnings. The discipline of searching and seeking to embrace the covenant is itself valuable.

Perhaps the fragmentation of so many traditions is itself a call forward. So often during Shabbat and sitting in silence, I feel a gratitude that comes from the possibility the brokenness of tradition affords. How else would I experience this diaspora and the beauty within it? How else will my fidelity be tested and strengthened? The suffering that has brought about the fragmentation we inherit is beyond words and continues today in so many countries and cultures. Still, within the horror, the journey continues. The covenant beckons and fidelity is called for. I often wonder if it is possible to be grateful for a journey that is uneven, discontinuous, and even violent. And yet the theoretical question is belied by the experience. It is precisely in the brokenness that gratitude comes into view. I experience a power that sometimes overwhelms me. At other times the power is so subtle that the experience eludes me. Do we often miss the overwhelming and subtle experience of gratitude because we seek to place it within a framework that no longer exists? Do we seek to place a reality that is beyond naming into a historical naming or mistake a historical naming for our own vocabulary? Does the search for order and certainty replace the possibilities inherent in a dynamic experience that elicits names but avoids a final naming?

It may be that the world has always been fragmented beyond the order imposed upon it by humans in search of certainty. Perhaps the covenant has always traveled freely and been embraced by people searching beyond the confines of the known. The mystical path, found in every tradition, is testimony to this, but the reality I experience is not among the esoteric and the few. The fragmentation and the search are found within ordinary life, among the many and at the very heart of evolving disciplines of spirituality and everyday living. It is not beyond intact traditions. It is at the very heart of traditions fragmented by history.

THE ACADEMY, JEWISH IDENTITY, AND THE BROADER TRADITION OF FAITH AND STRUGGLE

To travel the diaspora is to enter into another evolving sensibility and connect to another history. It is a move forward and backward at the same time, embracing diversity in the present and past. The struggle to

be faithful can be found in many places today and at many times in history. If fidelity in the contemporary world cannot be confined to any one place or community, the same must be true for the past. Thus the struggle to be faithful is nourished in this twofold movement in which the terrain of embrace and the resources of nourishment are expanded.

My fidelity is informed by Jews and others struggling in the present. One thinks of Amira Hass, a Jewish Israeli journalist who protests Israeli state power when it abuses Palestinians, and Sara Roy, a child of Holocaust survivors who has traveled among Palestinians and is a world expert on the economy of Gaza. But I am also nourished by the witness of Archbishop Romero, who stood with the poor of El Salvador and was murdered for speaking on their behalf, and of Gustavo Gutierrez, who has lived with the poor of his native Peru and founded the theology of liberation which speaks of a God active in the liberation of the marginalized and dispossessed. So too with history: I am nourished by the German-Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig and the German Christian who resisted Hitler, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. And further back in history, I am nourished by the founders of the great religions, including Buddha and Jesus.[8]

Should I be denied their insights and struggle? Should I turn away from the resources that are available to me and carried by others in the new diaspora? By denying them, I diminish my own sensitivity to others around me. And because those who have struggled to be faithful are interconnected through borrowings, cross-influence, and common trajectories, my denial would be a denigration of their contributions to our common history.

The broader tradition of faith and struggle can be found in the contemplation of a diaspora that is continuous over time. It is part of a search through history for justice and love, which, though always incomplete, even in its depth, is somehow complete in its effort. Whether Buddha or Jesus, Rosenzweig or Bonhoeffer, Shavit or Romero, all have sought commitment and community. The covenant has been present in each of their searches and in the particular idiom and rituals of their respective searches, whether theological, philosophical, or secular, shedding light on the struggles of our own day. I find that when I take my place in a broader tradition, there is a calling and a provision of resources for my own journey.

How, then, does this journey find a home within academe, within the education industry that increasingly dominates higher education? Is there a place for identity within the new diaspora in the academic world of the twenty-first century?

I am fortunate that I came to academia through teachers who recognized my commitments and thought as important to the intellectual and religious life of the world. Their first regard was not academic expertise or field competence; rather their interest was engagement with the world. This interest, one might say passion, joined two very different personalities and pedagogic styles—Richard Rubenstein and William Miller—in a joint commitment of thought and public life. Rubenstein's *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism* and Miller's *A Harsh and Dreadful Love: Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement* exemplify the considered and explosive ideas of thinkers who also held academic posts.[9] It was their witness in writing and in the classroom that propelled me to work among the poor at the Catholic Worker and to find my first teaching position at the Maryknoll School of Theology. The Catholic Worker introduced me to an entire body of philosophical and theological thought that provided the foundation for committed action in the world. It helped prepare me for my journey among the Maryknoll missionaries, who themselves helped bring to the surface and make available emerging liberation theologies of the Third World. In many ways, Maryknoll and liberation theology continued and broadened my entry into the Catholic Worker world, a journey into the world of poverty and struggle that focuses on existence within exile and the new diaspora in the twenty-first century.

The question remains as to where this journey can find a home in the academic world. If the journey into the new diaspora is experienced by many in different religious traditions and across racial and gender lines, the inclusion of Jews on this journey, or, as importantly, allowing Jewish scholars to articulate this journey in the academic world, is more problematic, for it seems a double standard exists in the academic world. Christian scholars are allowed to explore the world in its many dimensions and incorporate the insights gained into a broader vision of what it means to be Christian. These very same scholars often see Jews within a special category. Jews are Jews. They have a certain place in the theological world that can be argued about but essentially cannot change. When it comes to hiring and recognition, this special place is defining *and* confining. Jews must remain Jewish in a form recognized by Christians even as the Christianity they adopt is difficult to recognize within traditional categories.

Hence Jews who travel the diaspora and who are in exile from their own community are often thought of as diverging from Judaism, even by Christians who may likewise be traveling this diaspora in exile from their own communities. That is why most Jews hired for religious

studies departments and seminaries are in stereotypical roles: as teachers of Hebrew and the "Old" Testament or in Jewish or Holocaust studies. The most radical departures are the hiring of Jews in New Testament studies, or so it is thought. Upon reflection, however, this is simply an expansion of the stereotypical role accorded Jews in the first place. Jews teach Christians about their own origins or help them reflect on the Jewishness of their own Christianity. Hence Jews are legitimated in their identity for scholarly institutions when they can serve as mirrors for the opening of Christians to new understandings of their own intellectual and religious constructs.[10]

The role of Jews in the study of religion has been crucial to the renewal of Christianity in the West. It has forced Christians into a more critical understanding of their own history and has expanded the terrain that Christians can legitimately call Christian. Yet this has also encouraged a romanticized view of Jews that leaves little in the way of critical assessment of the Jewish tradition or contemporary Jewry.

As Christians call on Jews to remain in their place and serve Christians in their search for new forms of fidelity and embrace, Jewish thought has atrophied. New critical spaces for Jewish renewal have not been identified. Jewish culture—worldviews, symbols, and critical thought—has worked to enrich Christianity rather than to nourish renewal from within the Jewish community. Indeed, Jews serve as archetypal heraldry in the Christian search for new terms of fidelity and embrace, and Jews assent to a quid pro quo to be assured of access to and acceptance within the broader culture and its legitimating institutions. Many Jewish academics take on the role willingly, and their status and incomes have risen dramatically. The Jewish community has a vested interest in the work of these academics, as they provide an intellectual front for a romanticized view of Jews and Judaism where once there was demonization and silence. This comes at a time when the policies of the state of Israel and legitimation of those policies by Jewish leadership and academics endanger the continuation of Jewish history as we have known and inherited it.

This may sound abstract or a case of special pleading. But a fuller consideration of some questions and examples makes this argument more concrete; these questions are also a challenge. There are, for example, no critical Jewish thinkers at established academic institutions who are known for their critical examination of Judaism and Jewish life, especially in relation to the expanding state of Israel and the Palestinian catastrophe. Compare these thinkers with the following in terms of critical reflection on religion and religiosity that come out of

the Christian world: Rosemary Radford Ruether, Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Otto Maduro, James Cone, Carter Heyward, to name but a few. Jews hired to teach at major academic and seminary institutions are universally ensconced in predictable scholarly areas tied to the academy's circumscribed understanding, based on categorical assertions of identity, of the nature of their intellectual contributions. An example worth contemplating is Harvard Divinity School. After an exhaustive search to find an occupant for the first Jewish chair in the school's history, the area of academic distinction chosen is predictable: "Old" Testament. Now compare the methodology and critical thought of the person who investigates "New" Testament studies at the same school, Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza. Do you think it would be possible—did it ever cross the mind of the Divinity faculty—to hire a Jewish faculty member with the same piercing critical skills as Schussler Fiorenza?

Even the above-mentioned Christian scholars are often quiet or romantic when it comes to the Jewish tradition. They are either silent on or uncritical about contemporary Jewry. Examples: Schussler Fiorenza limits her discussion of Judaism to the time of the early Christians as a way of speaking affirmatively to the qualities of the Jesus movement that were subsequently abandoned. Carter Heyward refers to Jews primarily in the framework of the Holocaust and Elie Wiesel, bypassing completely, and in a way that she would find completely unacceptable in her own tradition, the use of the memory of the Holocaust to displace Palestinians from their homeland. James Cone has not mentioned Jews in print since the early 1970s. Is this because of the ominous presence of Jewish Theological Seminary across the street? Name more than one Christian scholar who interacts critically with Judaism historically and, more important, with contemporary Jewish life. Hint: the issue is Palestinians, and the one scholar is Rosemary Radford Ruether. Name another.[11]

Of all the liberal seminaries in the United States, none has taken on the question of Palestine and Jewish life in a coherent and sustained way. Case study: Union Theological is a seminary that identifies with all sorts of liberation theologies. Is there a critical Jewish voice at Union, or even a Christian scholar that takes this issue seriously? Again the presence of Jewish Theological Seminary looms large. Union is silent either because Jews are unimportant in contemporary religious and political life or because Union is afraid of arousing the anger of the Jewish establishment. One might legitimately ask how Jewish seminaries themselves are nurturing the critical thought so important to the future of the Jewish people. The most prominent and

interesting thinker at Jewish Theological is predictably a writer on the Holocaust, David Roskies. Any broader application of the lessons of the Holocaust—even ideas arguably implicit in the construct of his own work—are opposed.[12]

The appointment process for Jewish hires is instructive here. Is there any other position in academic or seminary teaching that includes lectures and consultations with community groups outside the university seeking their imprimatur on appointments? Almost all appointments to Jewish chairs include a process of consultation and approval with local and sometimes national Jewish leadership. Also, other Jewish faculty members in other departments are often consulted about Jewish appointments in religion and Jewish studies. Is this done on a regular basis and with presumed veto power with any other subjects? Name one in the humanities.[13]

The result of these obstacles to Jewish critical thought is that *many leading critical thinkers on Jewish religiosity and the new diaspora are to be found outside the academic world.* Those who happen into the academic world are often jettisoned quickly and disappear. The few who even consider the possibility of the academic world find the doors closed to them. The consequences are clear. In the main, Jewish thinkers are not part of the discussion and debate surrounding the critical embrace of religiosity in the new diaspora, and Jewish students are precluded from hearing this discussion at the point when they are most ready for the critical thought so necessary to intellectual and spiritual growth. If they enter the discussion at all, it is by chance or in language and symbols that are foreign to them. Most feel the religious terrain to be a subject for Christians. The uncritical secularity of Jewish life increases.

With most critical Jewish religious thinkers outside of the academy, the future of critical Jewish religious thought is stunted. Is it fated to disappear altogether? In the consequent vacuum, critical consideration of Jewish identity is then abdicated to Hillel and other Jewish organizations whose primary role is to increase Jewish identification with the policies of the Jewish establishment in America and Israel, while also policing and censoring the realm of acceptable discourse.[14]

Many have observed that the ecumenical dialogue, at least among Christians and Jews, is at a dead end. The rules of engagement have become so rote and uncritical that Christians who are seeking a deeper understanding of their faith in relation to others are stunned at the inability of Jews to face their own history. But why should Christians be surprised, considering the dissent-stifling hiring practices for Jewish academics and the refusal of the academy to protest these practices

that would be totally unacceptable if applied to them? Is it imaginable that the local Catholic priest would be consulted about the hiring of Rosemary Radford Ruether or Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza? Would the local Catholic priest or bishop be consulted before an invitation to Gustavo Gutierrez is extended? Does one consult the appropriate denominational minister or priest before hiring James Cone or Carter Heyward? Could a critical Christianity be explored and taught if this same process routinely applied to Jews was applied to Christian theologians as well? This can and has happened to Catholic theologians in certain Catholic universities and seminaries. Still, the terrain is broader here. *It is the very taking in of dissident Catholic religious scholars by Protestant seminaries that has allowed Catholic thought to continue to evolve.* Again I think here of Ruether and Schussler Fiorenza, the former lately of Garrett-Evangelical and Berkeley, the latter of Harvard Divinity School. A joint front of concerned academics has made sure that the outcast of one community finds a home with another. This has allowed a cross-fertilization of tremendous importance for the growth in spirituality of both the Catholic and Protestant communities. It has also assured student access to those who teach and write on the frontiers of theology and spirituality.

The free flow and cross-fertilization so important to the future of religious thought and spirituality has, for the most part, been denied to Jewish thinkers and students alike. A question to consider: What would it have meant to contemporary Christian faith and to those searching Christians—and indeed the entire feminist theology movement—if Ruether and Schussler Fiorenza had been lost to the academic world because they could not find or maintain employment in Catholic institutions of higher learning?

Consider, then, what the future of Jewish thought might be within this pessimistic assessment of critical Jewish thought and identity in the academy. How will the next generation of Jews encounter critical Jewish religious thinkers? Will the academy that once excluded or limited Jewish presence and Jewish thought continue to exclude critical Jewish scholars? Will Christians and those of different religious faiths in the academy care about this? It is fascinating and tragic that the Jewish question, so prominent in discussions during the twentieth century, is now considered, at least in academic circles, to have been answered. With the help of the Jewish establishment, the academy has declared the question closed, at the very same moment that Jewish history and the Jewish tradition are fighting for survival.

But the new diaspora continues to evolve within Jewish and non-Jewish circles even as the exile of religious dissenters continues. The

education industry, including the American Academy of Religion, has little interest in this new diaspora. And for Jews, that interest is lacking even among most other dissenters, Christian and otherwise, who are busy building their academic empires, the ones they rightly criticized in the past. In some ways, recognition of the evolving character of the new diaspora has been blunted by the very figures who entered the academic world as revolutionaries and who now sit atop the pyramid of chairs and institutes. Thus the very icons of the new theology have paradoxically made it more difficult for the next stage of dissenting thought and new diaspora sensibility to emerge.

Perhaps the new revolutionaries are too aware of status and career, unlike their predecessors—at least in religious studies—who were mostly fleeing clerical positions and parish responsibilities or undergoing conversions of religion or outlook that spoke to the larger world about freedom, commitment, and possibility. Perhaps, like everything else in our culture, places in life and institution have become too defined. Can we really say that the professionalization of religious studies in these last decades has brought into sharper focus those questions that prompted the birth of religious studies as a field? Or that well-attended conventions and gatherings are more to the point, memorable, and even important for clarification of thought and commitment than they were decades ago? I wonder how Rubenstein or Miller would fare in today's job market, how their broad sensibilities would be seen within the narrowed categories of expertise that dominate the academic fields of religion, philosophy, and history.

In the end, perhaps, critical Jewish thought and the academic world exist in a dynamic tension. In exile, both within the Jewish community and the academy, critical Jewish thought awaits a hearing that may never come. At least for my generation the conclusion has already been reached. Other arenas of double standards may have fallen; the double standard toward Jews remains firmly in place.

NOTES

1. I have written about the challenge of Palestinians to Jewish life on numerous occasions. See Marc H. Ellis, *O Jerusalem: The Contested Future of the Jewish Covenant* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999); and *Israel and Palestine: Out of the Ashes; The Search for Jewish Identity in the 21st Century* (London: Pluto Press, 2003).
2. An example of this second-level reflection is found in Dwight Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999). This is not to criticize reflection on initially insurgent theologies. It is simply to state that these theologies now have well-placed interpreters in elite institutions, whereas the initiators of these struggles were rarely found in secure academic circles.
3. My initial exposure to the Holocaust in formal discourse was with Richard Rubenstein in 1971. I read then his now-classic *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and*

Contemporary Judaism (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966). That this book would lead to an academic position in a major department of religious studies, as it did for Rubenstein at Florida State University in 1970, is almost impossible to contemplate today. In fact, it is just the opposite. Today a book with such radical thought about Judaism and the future of Jewish life would doom a career.

4. I first wrote of this experience in *A Year at the Catholic Worker* (New York: Paulist, 1978). This book has recently been republished under the same title by Baylor University Press.
5. I reflect on my experiences at Maryknoll in *Revolutionary Forgiveness: Essays in Identity, Christianity and the Future of Religious Life* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2000); and *Practicing Exile: The Religious Odyssey of an American Jew* (Minnesota: Fortress, 2001).
6. These initial reflections on the effect of Palestinian suffering on Jewish life were published in my work *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987). The third edition of this book under the same title has just been published by Baylor University Press.
7. I discuss in more depth the subject of exile and the new diaspora in Marc H. Ellis, *Practicing Exile: The Religious Odyssey of an American Jew* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002).
8. For Amira Hass, see *Reporting from Ramallah: An Israeli Journalist in an Occupied Land,* ed. and trans. Rachel Leah Jones (New York: Semiotext(e), 2003). For Sara Roy, see her "Living with the Holocaust: The Journey of a Child of Holocaust Survivors," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 125 (Autumn 2002): 58–62.
9. William D. Miller, *A Harsh and Dreadful Love: Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker Movement* (New York: Liveright, 1973).
10. Obviously, the fact that Jews are allowed to teach New Testament studies and are invited to teach in some universities and seminaries is a revolutionary statement in some respects. It is less groundbreaking, however, when one considers that Jewish New Testament scholars are limited to commenting on history and Christian renewal. This is part of what I have called the ecumenical deal.
11. Rosemary Radford Ruether has written extensively and critically on Jewish empowerment and the culpability of the Jewish establishment in injustice. See Rosemary Radford Ruether and Herman Ruether, *The Wrath of Jonah: The Crisis of Religious Nationalism in the Middle East* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989).
12. See David Roskies*, Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984). His anger toward my expansion of his sense of the Jewish liturgy of destruction to include the Palestinian people was expressed to me in Warsaw before we both traveled to Auschwitz on a delegation. I discuss this journey in *Ending Auschwitz: The Future of Jewish and Christian Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 1994). The fact that Roskies had not read my writing on the subject did not deter him from his negative evaluation.
13. Those who like spirited discussions and/or angry confrontations that have nothing to do with academic or intellectual integrity should try applying for positions in Jewish and/or Holocaust studies. There is no other selection process quite like it.
14. Encounters with Hillel Centers on university campuses are another distinctive feature of contemporary Jewish academic life. Hillel provides an identity for Jewish students that overlooks the culpability at the heart of our community. Hillel also functions to police and censor both Jewish and non-Jewish academics who voice critical inquiries on the question of Palestine. Witness the "truth" squads that are routinely sent to disrupt speakers defined as anti-Israel and Hillel contact with parents and hometown rabbis of Jewish students who affiliate with student campus movements seeking justice for Palestinians.

9

BEING JOHN WOODROFFE: SOME MYTHICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE POSTCOLONIAL STUDY OF HINDU TANTRA

Jeffrey J. Kripal

> *To return [the mystical writer] to orthodoxy is surely to misunderstand him. Orthodoxy is a legal construction. It presents a vocabulary and a complex system of rules, written and unwritten, governing what [may] and may not be said in it. Such a system is not easily overthrown from the outside, but it can be destabilized from within, by writing that appears to accept its definitions and rules but runs in such a way as to generate paradoxes and so turn the system against itself. . . . [Hence] the mystic is a religious anarchist and utopian, who speaks for an ancient tradition of protest against religious alienation. The mystic tries to undermine the Law, and to create religious happiness by melting God [and the self] down—as we shall see.*
>
> —Don Cupitt[1]

I have written extensively on what we might call the anxiety of identity in contemporary American Indology, mostly because I have had to do this in order to explain—both to myself and to my critics—the meanings and motivations of what has become a very controversial work, my *Kālī's Child: The Mystical and the Erotic in the Life and Teachings of Ramakrishna.*[2] In this book I turned to a large Bengali textual corpus and studied the Śākta Tantra of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa (1836–1886), arguing in effect that one cannot fully understand and appreciate his conflicted relationship to the (heterosexual) symbols and rituals of that world and to women without positing a clear homoerotic sexual orientation in the saint and, more speculatively, a likely history of sexual trauma. The work was warmly received in

many circles of the international academy, and the unofficial, anecdotal, "off-screen" support for its basic ideas in India appears at times to be considerable.[3] To take just one of many examples, India's premiere psychoanalytic writer and public intellectual, Sudhir Kakar, appears to have fictionalized parts of the book in his well-received novel on the lives of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, *Ecstasy.*[4]

But a particular type of ultraconservative, highly politicized Hindu reaction has been quite negative, to say the least. After seven years of attacks on my person in the Indian press, two organized ban movements in India against the book (the last ending in the Rajyasabha or Upper House of Parliament), and God only knows how many Web sites reviling my work, I am tired, weary really, and there is only so much one can do to explain oneself. I have certainly done more than most. Indeed, as of this date, I have published eight (now nine) essays and a second book on methodology and identity in the study of comparative mysticism in an attempt to explain why I think what I think and why this does not make me Satan incarnate (or, which amounts to the same thing in Indological circles these days, an "orientalist").[5] I thought I had said enough.

And then I went to Denver for the 2001 American Academy of Religion (AAR) meeting. It was not as if I heard anything new or unusual there. I did not. Rather, it was how it was said or, better, how it all seemed to organize itself over a four-day academic ritual of panels, meals, and seemingly random, almost synchronous hallway and bookstall encounters within a polarized expression of opposites, complete with a mediating third that Claude Lévi-Strauss would have recognized immediately as mythical. I did anyway. What follows is a kind of "secondary revision" of those days, a reworking of a hundred memories and thoughts into a too-neat narrative and subsequent reflection that together carry the essential truths of those days as I experienced and thought them. As such, these thoughts by no means represent the meeting as it was for the thousands of participants who attended it but as it was for a single participant, that is, for me. Accordingly, I narrate the events more or less as they happened and then organize their patterns into the *coincidentia oppositorum* that I recognize as mythical but also as the basic epistemological structure that constitutes cross-cultural scholarship and hermeneutical work as a potential site of reflexivity and insight, public controversy, social justice, and, most radically, mystical practice.

Mysticism is a kind of writing here, a necessarily subversive or deconstructive practice that produces religious happiness in the individual by "melting down" in the here and now the oppressive dualisms of

religious orthodoxy that are set up to delay interminably salvation, liberation, or enlightenment and so keep the authoritarian structures of mediation and tradition solidly in place (Cupitt, 1998). The specific orthodoxy that I attempt to melt down here through my own "infernal method" (Kripal, 2000), however, is not a specifically religious one, although it has certainly taken on any number of religious expressions. I am referring to the negative "orientalism" analyzed most famously by Edward Said, that specific form of thought that essentializes "West" and "East" in order to subordinate the latter for political and economic colonization.[6] It is certainly not my intention here to deny the importance and incisiveness of Said's critiques. Indeed, his thought has permanently and positively altered the landscape of any responsible discussion of the Middle East and Asia. What I am particularly concerned about here are the multiple ways that Said's critique has occasionally devolved in the hands of others—over Said's own stated objections—into a kind of gross identity politics in which the charge of "orientalism" is used as an intellectual club to delegitimate or summarily dismiss the work of contemporary Western scholars whose ideas cannot be fit into the reigning orthodoxies.

I am also not at all convinced that the West's encounter with the Orient has been as universally dark and sinister as the orientalist critique, whether in the hands of Said or his students now, sometimes suggests. With such writers as Raymond Schwab, Wilhelm Halbfass, Arthur Versluis, J. J. Clarke, and David Weir, I would point to the strong and quite remarkable tendency of orientalist scholarship "to confront the structures of Western knowledge and power and to engage with Eastern ideas in ways which are more creative, more open-textured, and more reciprocal than are allowed for in Said's critique."[7] Orientalism, Clarke continues, "cannot simply be identified with the ruling imperialist ideology, for in the Western context it represents a counter-movement, a subversive entelechy . . . which has often tended to subvert rather than to confirm the discursive structures of imperial power" (Clarke, 1997, 9). Daniel Gold is even more explicit in his suggestion that "the sins do not seem mortal":

> To the extent that the study of others' religions has filled an existential void experienced by some Western intellectuals, the other presented in colonial discourse—particularly in its romanticized versions—has testified to our lack, not to our superiority. . . . Certainly, other traditions do not always—or even usually—reveal the same secrets to us that they do to those within them. We are likely, moreover, to differ among ourselves as to the real meanings of those secrets, just as do people within the traditions themselves. . . . A Western project, history of religions serves Western

> religiocultural needs, but in doing so, it often lets non-Western voices be heard in ways more profound than they have been before. It is true that these are usually not just the same voices heard on their home ground, but, transformed in the imagination of the scholar, they may reverberate more tellingly here.[8]

Put simply, then, I am deeply suspicious of the ways that Said's work has sometimes been used to demonize the perspectives of contemporary Western scholars as "orientalist," and how easily any historical-critical thought about India or Hinduism can be summarily dismissed as a "neocolonial strategy" within the hegemonic worldview of this allegedly antihegemonic critique. This latter practice, I would suggest, is a language game that no Western Indologist can possibly find integrity or authenticity in, much less win. All the implicit rules and terms are set up precisely to insure that the "orientalist" lose, precisely as the same dualistic, hierarchical structures were set up in a previous era to make certain that the "oriental" lost. Certainly the social, psychological, and physical stakes cannot possibly be equated, as if the immense centuries-long sufferings of colonial peoples around the globe and the wounded egos of a few contemporary Western intellectuals were somehow on a par. This is not at all what I am about here. What I am about is the suggestion that dualistic, essentializing structures of thought, aimed at *either* the "oriental" *or* the "orientalist," need to be melted down now within a new postcolonial, postmodern form of writing, thinking, acting, and being that can quite accurately and appropriately be called "mystical." This, anyway, is what I will attempt here through the telling of a personal myth.

ARTHUR AVALON 30,000 FEET UP

My pilgrimage to Denver[9] began with the pleasure of reading on the plane Kathleen Taylor's new study of Sir John Woodroffe (1865–1936), the Calcutta high court judge who revolutionized Western understandings of Tantra in the second and third decades of the twentieth century through a series of remarkable translations, lectures, and books on the meaning of the Śākta Tantra.[10] Woodroffe's life, I would suggest, is a parable of sorts for our present concerns about postmodern religious identity and scholarship, so I would like to dwell here for a moment, at the beginning, with this remarkable life.

The Woodroffes were of Irish Protestant stock but converted to Catholicism when John—or "Jack" as his family called him—was still a young child. At thirteen he was sent to Monsignor Lord Petre's Woburn Park, an experimental Catholic boarding school both famous

and controversial for its educational philosophy and methods. Lord Petre, it turns out, rejected authoritarianism and organized the school around its own parliament, through which the students themselves made many of the administrative decisions. He also rejected what he called "muscular Christianity" and opted instead for the creation of cultural gentlemen who were neither "devotees" nor "renunciates." His aim, as he put it in one pamphlet, was "the abolition of asceticism, of mortification, of piety" (*Woodroffe*, 28). This, it seems, involved some rather intimate relations with the boys. His private sitting room, described by one contemporary observer, contained "a couple of beds for boys who happened to be a little more delicate than the rest." Lord Petre was also known to suggest with reference to well-known "immoralities" that some saw "sin where no sin be" (*Woodroffe*, 32). There is no evidence that such a homoerotic community informed Woodroffe's own psychosexuality, but the clear emphasis on a kind of "anti-ascetic, incarnational ethic" (*Woodroffe*, 186) and a rejection of renunciation does in fact carry over into his reading of Tantra, which he diplomatically held up in his 1917 and 1918 lectures before the Vivekananda Society of Calcutta as a more adequate form of Vedantic spirituality than that ascetic, celibate, and world-denying variety postulated by both Ramakrishna and Vivekananda (*Woodroffe*, 183–186).

Taylor recounts a fascinating story in which Woodroffe tells the story of "a man I know who had lost his mother" who was told by the nineteenth-century Śākta saint Bamaksepa to seek out the Mother of the Universe. Taylor believes that this third party was in fact Woodroffe himself, whose mother died in 1894 (*Woodroffe*, 14). In true psychoanalytic fashion, then, Woodroffe's Tantric search for the Mother would be initiated by the loss of his own biological mother. Probably shortly after 1904, when he became a judge, Woodroffe met another Tantric saint, Sivacandra Vidyarnava, who likely initiated him into Tantra and before whom Woodroffe is said to have received a very dramatic "electric shock" *śakti-pāta* experience during the night of Kālī Pūjā, probably in 1906 (*Woodroffe*, 102–104).[11] Most likely, 1912 was the year of the famous Konarak photo, in which Woodroffe, E. B. Havell (close friend, fellow Tantric practitioner, and art historian), and a Bengali pundit named Atul Behari Ghose appear in Indian dress before the temple to Sūrya the sun god, famous, among other things, for its remarkably graphic erotic sculpture. The books of Arthur Avalon began to appear the next year. By 1922, Woodroffe was retiring from the high court and moving back to England, where he lectured in Indian law at University College Oxford. In 1930, he retired to France and died in Beausoleil, outside Monte Carlo, in 1936.

Perhaps the feature of Woodroffe's life that is most significant for our purposes is the nature of "Arthur Avalon," the pen name that Woodroffe used for many of his most important publications. Until Taylor's work, most everyone assumed that this was simply a poorly kept secret, a romantic and translucent game that Woodroffe played to link his work on Tantra in India to the mystic isle in southern England and its most famous legendary guest, King Arthur. What Taylor convincingly demonstrates, however, is that "Arthur Avalon" (a name most likely inspired by one of Woodroffe's favorite paintings, Burne Jones's *Arthur's Sleep in Avalon*) was not John Woodroffe at all but a potent combination of Sir John Woodroffe, the respected English judge, and Atul Behari Ghosh, the Bengali Tantric pundit who in fact accomplished the impressive textual work and translations of the books. Woodroffe, it turns out, did not translate all those texts or master all that Sanskrit. Ghosh did. But Ghosh was convinced that such a display of linguistic mastery would be far more effective if it could be presented as that of an "orientalist," that is, of a respectable Englishman with a high standing in the colonial administrative system. He was, of course, absolutely right, and Woodroffe assented, hinting on occasion in his Avalon books that they were in fact collaborations with a friend who wished not to be named. The result was a powerful corpus whose emphasis on the integrity of Tantric philosophy, easy synthesis of mystical and scientific monisms, and dominance of *kuṇḍalinī-yoga* inform modern Asian-Western spiritualities to this day, particularly within what we call the New Age. The New Age and Western presentations of Śākta Tantra, it turns out, have been far more collaborative than any of us dared imagine. Even today, Taylor reminds us, the isle of Avalon (Glastonbury) is a center of New Age practice and occultism (*Woodroffe*, 149).

Woodroffe and Ghosh, as if still tuned into their shared identity, died just a few days apart in 1936. "Death," Taylor writes in her last sentence, "by taking the two friends at the same time, seemed to seal the hidden bond that forged Arthur Avalon" (*Woodroffe*, 238).

VISHNU ON FREUD'S DESK: PSYCHOANALYTIC STUDY AS PERCEIVED DEFAMATION

The first panel I attended in Denver I dreaded, as I knew I was the subtext of much of its discussion. The main title was hardly encouraging, although the subtitle was at least hopeful: "Defamation/Anti/Defamation: Hindus in Dialogue with the Western Academy."[12] The eight panelists spoke from a wide spectrum of positions and addressed a wide range

of issues, from ethnographic accuracy, to a helpful Gandhian model for controversy and debate, to the institutional and historical asymmetries that exist between Western and Indian scholarship. As it turned out, the "defamation" of the main title was more hopeful than I had first thought, since it actually worked both ways, with some panelists addressing the hurt many Hindus experience reading Western scholarship and other panelists addressing the hurt that Western scholars feel being misunderstood or misrepresented by potentially motivated Hindus. Nor was my work the only topic—far from it indeed. Lower-caste voices and the place of women in Indian society were also front and center in both the panel papers and the discussion session afterward.

But since this is an essay about my own self-understanding, allow me to reflect for a moment on how the panel treated my own work (and self). Three of the panelists alluded to my monograph on Ramakrishna (*Kālī's Child*) and/or my coedited reader on psychoanalysis and Hinduism.[13] In a move that puzzled me at the time, I do not remember any of them actually stating what my ideas are. For example, the homoerotic hypothesis or the trauma thesis were never mentioned, as if they were literally unspeakable even in a professional academic setting. Rather, the panelists focused on my translation errors (which I have never denied and have publicly apologized for twice now ["Response," "The Tantric Truth"]), my alleged failure to dialogue with the tradition (a perception that could not be any more mistaken ["Response," "The Tantric Truth"]), and the offended receptions that the books have received on various Web sites (a perception that could not be any more accurate ["The Tantric Truth"]).

In short, the actual ideas of the books were simply irrelevant here. Rather, what the panelists seemed to be suggesting in their own specific ways (I must be careful here, as they were clearly speaking from very different perspectives) was that these kinds of ideas—again never really defined or described—should simply not be discussed in print, especially by a Western scholar such as myself. There was a brief mention of intellectual freedom, but it seemed to mean very little indeed, as the overwhelming impression that I received from these speakers was that there are real limits to intellectual freedom, that the religious community should get to define those limits, and finally, that the notion of religious offense (or more ominously, the legal category of defamation) should become a controlling factor on academic discourse and publishing. These, anyway, were my personal impressions, no doubt somewhat exaggerated or magnified by the emotional fact that I was the primary example of their critiques.

But "the secret" is never an absolute silence, and, ironically, to conceal it is also to make it more powerful. The secret, in other words, is always a truth that must be spoken, that somehow *wants* to be spoken. Happily, then, the absolute necessity and freedom of expression was actively celebrated as an essential component of the practice of scholarship as *satyagrāha* or "truth-grasping" by two other panelists, an American Vedic scholar and an Indian working in Hindu-Christian dialogue. These two women literally enacted the power of cross-cultural scholarship by taking turns giving their paper. Here there was no mention of "defamation" but only of speaking the truth to one's dialogue partner(s) exactly as one sees it, no matter what the cost to one's professional career or reputation. In a genuine Gandhian spirit, Truth was God in this intellectual and religious world, something ultimately sacred that cannot be sacrificed to the dubious, if quite understandable, ideals of offense, public consensus, or political correctness.

THE EROTIC EMBRACE

Similar themes were taken up in another panel the next day that seemed to work like some Lévi-Straussian mediating third between the two false positions of "East" and "West." "Embracing Orientalism: South Asian Spirituality in Global Context" was dedicated to what we might call a positive or romantic orientalism, that is, a warm embrace by Westerners of Indian spiritualities for their own unique cultural and psychosexual needs. The papers were, to say the least, fascinating, occasionally lighthearted, and sometimes beautifully sensuous, even occasionally ecstatic. I would like to address just two of them.

Hugh Urban's "Tantra, American Style: Neo-Orientalism, Globalism, and the Western Appropriation of Tantra" looked at the history of American appropriations of Tantra from Pierre Bernard's early-twentieth-century New York Tantric hotel (the press referred to him as "the Omnipotent Oom") to recent virtual incarnations of the tradition on the Internet. In one image, we saw "American Tantra" represented by an attractive blonde (barely) wrapped in an American flag; in another image, this one from a book cover, we saw a sexy four-armed Kālī at a Western bar, casually sipping a cocktail as she gossiped with other goddesses and heroines from other cultures. Urban suggested that such translations come dangerously close to a kind of neocolonialism in which Westerners misappropriate Indian traditions and overemphasize the sexual dimensions of Tantra for their own needs and, in the process, turn India into a kind of New Age sexual-spiritual commodity.

Roxanne Poormon Gupta's "Embracing Orientalism and Exposing the Goddess" offered a vigorous response to Urban's paper. Gupta looked at a new temple complex in South India whose resident guru has initiated some striking iconographic and ritual traditions. Specifically, the central *liṅgam* of the temple was a very large anatomically exact penis, and the temple is dominated by a community of beautifully sculpted naked yoginīs. Gupta, herself an initiate of Śrī Vidyā Tantra, also recounted a Tantric ritual she took part in during which women worshipped the naked bodies of each other as the guru and men sat behind a wall and closed door. Tantric eroticism, Gupta argued, is not something imagined or created by Westerners. It is indigenous to the tradition, and it is absolutely central to the tradition.

The question-and-answer period saw a helpful discussion between Urban and Gupta in which they essentially acknowledged each other's positions, Urban agreeing with Gupta that Tantric eroticism is indigenous and worthy of attention, and Gupta agreeing with Urban that certain features of the Śrī Vidyā temple may have been influenced by Western writing on Tantra (the guru's library, she had pointed out in her paper, is filled with books penned by Western authors). Gupta concluded that our present is defined by a thoroughgoing postmodern confluence of "Eastern" and "Western" cultures and, as long as this is handled responsibly and with a degree of self-reflexivity, that this is something to be celebrated and studied, not bemoaned and condemned as a kind of negative "orientalism." At some point, words like "East" and "West" (and, I would add, "spiritual" and "sexual") become effectively meaningless. We are in the middle here, in the *coincidentia oppositorum* of the myth, the mystic, and the cross-cultural hermeneut.

I could not help but marvel at how different the subject and emotional tone of this panel was from the one I had attended the previous day. Whereas the previous panel had refused to even utter my theses about sexuality and mysticism, this morning we saw slides of a naked blonde wrapped in an American flag, of beautiful naked yoginī statues, and of an immense *liṅgam* that was sculpted to look exactly like an erect penis. The secret was not concealed here. Quite the contrary, it was fully exposed and celebrated as a religious reality. Moreover, and most important, gone were the reified dualisms of "insider" and "outsider" or "West" and "East." Here it was an Indian swami (represented by a female Western convert to Hinduism), not a Western scholar, who wanted to talk openly about sexuality and Hinduism. And here it was a Western scholar, not a conservative Hindu, who wanted to ask difficult questions about the objectification and commodification of South

Asian Tantra in the West. Significantly, people laughed instead of frowned. The binary opposites had been mediated and temporarily transcended in a mythical third, a space that was self-reflexive enough to speak to both South Asian and Western historical perspectives. In Cupitt's terms, the orthodox dualisms had begun to melt down into a kind of cross-cultural happiness.

QUEERING CATHOLICISM

The final panel I attended was sponsored by the Gay Men's Issues in Religion group and was entitled "Engaging Sodom: Responses to Mark D. Jordan's *The Silence of Sodom: Homosexuality in Modern Catholicism*."[14] Having grown up Catholic and having read Jordan's *The Silence of Sodom* as a virtual psychic description of my experience in the seminary, I was interested in how the book might be critically received at the AAR. Briefly, Jordan argues in *The Silence of Sodom* that modern Catholicism (and much of historical Catholicism) is symbolically, theologically, and institutionally structured around a sexual irony, paradox, or tragedy (depending upon one's view). The Church, Jordan argues, provides some astonishingly rich possibilities for homoerotic experience through her liturgy, doctrine, and community, even as she homophobically condemns and denies any active expression of homosexuality and so imposes untold (and unnecessary) suffering on many of her most faithful members. Addressing this situation, Jordan calls for a simultaneous celebration of the Church's homoerotic legacies and practices and a disciplined, reasoned rejection of her homophobia as means to create, sustain, and express ever new and ever more radical forms of being holy as being queer.

This was a very powerful experience for me, precisely because, again, I could not help but compare its emotional tones and intellectual content with the first panel I had attended two days before. The first panel, of course, was partly about a particular kind of ultraconservative or ideologically motivated Hindu reaction to Western scholarship on sexuality that claims (quite falsely) to speak for all Hindus. The tradition, of course, is infinitely more diverse, rich, and liberal than this, but you would hardly have known it from the panel presentations on my work. Moreover, because such perspectives are also often deeply homophobic, panel members could only read my discussion of Ramakrishna's homeroticism as an act of "defamation," that is, as a willed, ill-intentioned statement of falsehoods.[15] This, I think, tells us a great deal about one segment of Hindus and their sexual moralities (and of course we have seen the same among ultraconservative

Christian groups), but nothing at all about my own work or its religious and ethical motivations.

This becomes crystal clear when we compare the first panel on defamation to the final one on queering Catholicism. What was framed as "defamation" in one context became a celebrated expression of "social justice" in another. *Exactly the same ideas* about religious homoeroticism that elicited angry frowns and hurt feelings in the former context ignited laughter, joy, and community in the latter. Whereas the first panel spoke about "drawing lines" and implicitly sought a kind of scholarly silence, the latter was a bold display of "acting up," "coming out," and "speaking out." Certainly there was much talk of anger and hurt feelings here as well, but it was all coming from exactly the opposite direction, that is, from sexual minorities speaking about the sufferings a conservative religious tradition unjustly imposes on them. The psychosexual dynamics of conservative repression and liberal catharsis could not have found two more powerful ritual displays.

Significantly, my name and work were referenced by name in both panels, but whereas that work was misrepresented (or better, not represented), never described, and condemned in the first context, it was represented accurately, accurately summarized, and used warmly in the last. For example, one of the panelists, Bob Goss, author of the pioneering homoerotic reading of Jesus, *Jesus Acted Up*,[16] used my most recent work on mystical homoeroticism in Catholicism, and both the tone and the content of the entire panel was in perfect sync with everything I have written about similar issues in both the Hindu and Catholic traditions. Nothing, of course, changed about my work between Saturday and Monday—all that had changed was the social context of its reception and discussion.

And yet that is not quite fair, for what really set the two panels apart was my own context and perceived identity. Writing about Hindu homosexualities as a Western intellectual (the subtext of the first panel), after all, is not at all the same thing as writing about Catholic homosexualities as a Western intellectual (the main text of the second panel). I understand the importance of such contexts, but I also reject as intellectually vacuous their apotheosis as the criterion of academic truth. Does Ramakrishna's sexual orientation really depend upon my skin color and religious upbringing? Of course not. Then neither should the truth-value of my or anyone else's scholarship. A powerful idea is a powerful idea, whoever utters it. In this postmodern age, in which truth has virtually disappeared into power and identity politics, this, of course, is heresy, but it is nevertheless, well, still true. In a modernist frame now, it is a profound and ultimately religious truth

(*satya*) that we must hold onto (*grāha*) as if our very souls depended upon it. I would suggest that in fact they do.

MELTING DOWN THE INSIDE AND THE OUTSIDE

As I walked out of this final panel and to dinner with a colleague, I realized once again just how precarious and precious my position is (I also mischievously wondered what would happen if we could somehow get the Hinduism group and Gay Men's Issues in Religion group together—now *that* would be dialogue). As a Western convert to many aspects of a Hindu worldview (if not to contemporary Hinduism),[17] my most fundamental self-understandings are denied and attacked within some very vocal subcultures of contemporary Hinduism. As a straight white male with deep affection for sexual minorities, I feel quite at home in a room full of gay males, and yet there too I am inescapably other. Mine is a liminal existence caught or suspended between and betwixt the worlds, not unlike, I suppose, the nineteenth-century Bengali *babu* who had to mediate between his own and the colonial culture or, closer to home, the contemporary American–South Asian teenager who has to figure out how to relate his parents' cultural heritage in India to his own very different set of life experiences here in the States. We are all multiple selves; we are all a bit queer, aren't we?

Such complex identities are, I think, an especially powerful catalyst of thought and reflection. Multiplicity, like comparison, engenders critical thinking and new perspectives "outside the box." They also lead to dramatic ethical reflection. Suspended between the spaces of multiple cultures, we can better see the constructed nature of *all* cultures (including and especially our own) and recognize their inherent injustices. This is why academic methodology so often follows the concerns of those who work for social justice, and why the comparative discipline of history of religions can be politically progressive (Gold, 39): all three practices seek to uncover the radically asymmetrical structures of power and control that define every human culture and create, in the process, human suffering.

This is especially evident with respect to human sexuality, that biologically determined and socially constructed microscope of power, authority, repression, and expression. And it becomes only more so when intellectual work forces on one, quite despite one's own sense of propriety and inherited will not to know, an awareness that some of the most profound and beautiful forms of religious experience are likely linked to some of the most profound and traumatic forms of

sexual suffering.[18] Judith Herman is clear about what this means for the intellectual who refuses to look away. Reflecting on the publication of her *Trauma and Recovery*, she wrote five years later on what she calls "the dialectic of trauma":

> I argued then that the study of psychological trauma is an inherently political enterprise, because it calls attention to the experience of oppressed people. I predicted that our field would continue to be beset by controversy, no matter how solid its empirical foundation, because the same historical forces that in the past have consigned major discoveries to oblivion continue to operate in the world.[19]

This has been my experience as well. It does not matter how obvious the Bengali texts are or how convincing the homoerotic and traumatic theses are to someone outside (or even within) the tradition. For many, the truths are, like the Tantric goddess Kālī herself, just too difficult to accept, just too many-armed to fathom. They are also quite literally traumatic. I understand that. They are difficult for me as well, and I have often wished that they had never appeared to me or that I had repressed them when they did. With my offended Hindu colleagues and critics, I am sometimes horrified by what I see (at least with the traumatic material), even as I am also stunned and awed by the beauty and aesthetic power of this Śākta universe. They want to address colonial trauma. I want to talk about sexual trauma. We are not so different. We both seek justice and truth and the good.

For myself, I believe that my *darśana* or theoretical vision, again like Kālī, however initially terrifying, is ultimately redemptive, and I know that my imperfect expression of the Tantric vision on the page issues from a deep sense of responsibility to the truth as I see it. I have never written a single sentence, a single word, that was not honest, that did not issue from an intimate match between my mental state and the text through which it was expressing itself. I would call this faithfulness to the material, this undeniable link between psychic state and written word, "authenticity." It is, I think, ultimately what gives my work whatever power it has. Indeed, occasionally even my devotional critics see this. One particularly insightful woman at the Vedānta Society bookstall in Denver, for example, commented after talking to me that she could see how *Kālī's Child* was "karmically necessary" for me. I could not have said it better.

This existential authenticity that issues from a union between religious soul and professional life is what my seminary chaplains and spiritual directors would have called my "vocation" and what the Indian tradition might call my *adhikāra*, my authority to speak that issues from a certain kind of initiatory experience.[20] Unlike the traditional Catholic

or Indian situations, however, such a postmodern vocation or cross-cultural *adhikāra* does not bring me any kind of stable identity or religious community with which to identify. Rather, it gives me a voice with which to speak the unspeakable secret within a remarkably free, loosely organized society, the American Academy of Religion. The issues of "the insider" and "the outsider" are especially complex here, for whereas I am definitely an insider of the academy, with a twelve-year *sādhana* or "spiritual discipline" behind me (my undergraduate and graduate training), I am just as clearly an outsider to one of the traditions I study, in this case early-modern Hinduism. If many of my conservative Hindu critics, then, can tell me that I do not understand Hinduism, I can just as easily tell them that they do not understand contemporary scholarship—in this model, we both clearly lack the proper initiation and cultural experience (in their case, a PhD; in my case, birth into a Hindu family; in both cases, immediate access to nineteenth-century Bengal).

But, alliteratively speaking, such a dualistic dilemma is dysfunctional and, more importantly, deeply out of touch with the religious realities of our postcolonial, postmodern world. What this world calls us to do, I think, is not to balkanize our cultural experiences and either retreat back into premodern fantasies of cultural isolation and superiority (à la fundamentalism) or modern dreams of conquest and control (à la colonialism), but to enter fully and passionately into the challenge of contemporary religious pluralism in order to try to make sense of it all, not from the inside or the outside, but in the in-between. It is not, then, necessarily a matter of having to choose between being an insider and being a critical scholar—both are potential modalities of the same individual. Some at least will choose to embrace marginal positions and use them creatively to turn the inside out and the outside in, mystically to melt the dualisms, as it were. There are, after all, few metaphors more unstable within a nondual worldview than "inside" and "outside"; nonduality is nonduality, not a cover for ethnocentrism or political ideology, and if everything is really nondual, then an American subject is as much an expression of this nonduality as is a South Asian one. Put differently, the ontological implications of nonduality (as opposed to its historical and social expressions) make a pure mockery of the dualistic structures of negative orientalism, including and especially the unstable metaphors of the "insider" and "outsider."

IDENTITY AND THE IDENTICAL

My position vis-à-vis the issues of identity, authority, and scholarship, then, might be summarized as follows. There are different kinds of

authority with different kinds of sources. Authority can come from mastery of the material or of a particular method; in this case, there is no necessary connection between academic credibility and personal identity, nor should there be. There *must* be many chairs at the academic table for the secular scholar, the reductionist, and the dreaded "atheist," right next to the conservative Christian and Hindu; otherwise none of us can claim that what we do is a respectable intellectual discipline, and the academy has every right and duty to ignore us.

Another kind of authority, however, can arise from intensely imaginal, intuitive, or visionary experiences in the anthropological field or the historian's primary text (*Roads*). The connection of this type of authority to academic credibility and personal identity is much more complex. To the extent that such experiences arise in the person through prolonged immersion in the cultural material as field or text, they have clear and unmistakable connections to both academic legitimacy (for they usually signal a deep immersion in the material and constitute in themselves new cultural phenomena that can and should be analyzed) and human identity (for they arise in and as the person). By their very nature, then, such experiences occupy a liminal realm that can be reduced neither to academic expertise nor to subjective identity.

What is crucial to keep in mind, however, is that these kinds of unusual events are actually not that unusual. Quite the contrary, they are found in virtually all cultures, and as such seem to be universal potentials of the human psyche that can be activated by a wide range of cultural practices and framed or interpreted in radically different ways. Certainly the careful historian of religions cannot equate shamanistic trance, the Christian *unio mystica*, and the yogic *samādhi*, nor can she ignore the rather obvious ways such states undergird or challenge social structures and political authority,[21] but neither can she so easily separate them as if they were phenomena of different types of brains. They are not—they clearly exist along a spectrum of universal psychic functioning. The human brain, in other words, cued by very different texts and rituals and doctrines (which it, of course, created in the first place), may be capable of firing in millions, if not billions, of genuinely different ways, but it is always the same brain putting on the neural fireworks. *No* culture, then, "owns" the mind's ability to alter consciousness, and unless we are prepared to argue that the brain of a historian of mysticism is radically different from that of a medieval mystic or modern-day saint (and I am not), we must acknowledge that the "identity" of which we speak here is doubly significant, suggesting both our own individual and unique cultural identities and the virtually

identical neurobiology of the human brain and body, wherever and whenever they are found in recorded history.

Ultimately, then, the authority and hermeneutical value of the historian's psychological experiences issues neither from personal vanity nor deluded fantasy but from the empirical identity between interpreter and interpreted that our shared neurobiology provides us in such fantastic genetic abundance. Put simply, we all have the same brain, and this is of immense hermeneutical consequence. This, of course, cannot help us to adjudicate between different interpretive conclusions (since "the same brain" produces wildly different readings), but it can make us very wary of any ideological position that wants to locate "religious experience" of any kind within boundaries drawn on a map or within particular kinds of ethnic or racial bodies.

Given all of this, it is nevertheless true that authority and experience are also always contextual. All cultures might be capable of trance or ecstasy, but they frame, value, devalue, nurture, force, suppress, or ignore such states in radically different ways. And perhaps this is the final reason so many want to privilege, say, Tibetans or Indians within a reversed orientalism as "more spiritual": their cultures do indeed value—and so produce?—such states more easily than most Western cultures. The same, of course, is equally true of contemporary historical, psychological, and anthropological forms of consciousness and gnosis. All of these practices are products of Western—primarily Christian and Jewish—subcultures that arose at specific historical junctures to meet specifically Western cultural needs and questions. None arose in Asian cultures.

My position, then, is that one's authority can be based on the technical mastery of a theoretical skill or body of material, on personal experience, and/or on social context, but in *no instance* is this authority reducible to a simple identity between personal identity and public authority. One's ethnic or religious identities are all important factors in generating and assessing scholarship, but they do not and can never translate directly into authority, at least that kind of authority that is worth having in the academy.[22] Put in the terms of Cabezón's opening essay, identity can certainly affect or influence one's scholarship, but it can never legitimate or delegitimate it. I am hence not proposing a model in which "the insider" has authority and "the outsider" does not. Nor am I suggesting the opposite. Rather, I am calling for what is essentially a Tantric thesis, here radicalized into our present postcolonial, postmodern context, namely, that, although ontologically speaking there is neither an "inside" nor an "outside," neither an "East" nor a "West," these metaphorical dualisms can be intellectually useful and

culturally creative to the extent that we are willing to think through and transgress them in our intellectual practice as we work toward a more adequate human space beyond them.

Seen in this light, the American academy constitutes a most unusual, perhaps historically unique, postmodern social practice in which the properly trained (read: initiated) hermeneut can turn the inside out and the outside in through *both* critical theory *and* an intense imaginal, even religious encounter with the text or field (*Roads*). The resulting self-reflexivity, neither "inside" nor "outside" but always critical, is what constitutes both the power and the promise of such a path or method (lit. a "path" [*hodos*] one follows "after" [*meta*]) for those who are willing and capable of walking it.

I am not suggesting, then, that authority and authenticity reside only or primarily with either the "insider" or "outsider." Nor am I suggesting that these metaphors of the container ("inside" and "outside") are entirely illegitimate. Rather, I am suggesting that we should recognize their metaphorical status, honor the truths to which they speak, and then seek out a third *Grund* in which we can transgress and transcend them. Moreover, and most importantly, I am arguing that something unique, something special, something eminently valuable can come out of this Third that neither an insider nor outsider perspective, taken alone, could possibly provide on its own. This kind of hermeneutical truth resides only in the in-between, in the relationship, in the mystical meltdown of *both* the inside *and* the outside.

In this model, moreover, the polarities and passionate disagreements of what we call "controversy" are ultimately good, since they have the power both to expose the specific nature of our different positions and to lead us beyond them to something else, to something essentially new. Accordingly, real dialogue should *never* be equated with agreement or arbitrary rules about not speaking certain difficult truths, and no religionist should ever imagine, in his or her wildest dreams, that scholarship on Hinduism or Christianity or anything else will somehow magically support his or her own historically specific and relative worldview. Given the explicit bringing together of contradictory worldviews that all hermeneutical scholarship implies, this is simply impossible. Nor is it at all desirable. Indeed, in some sense, the more incommensurable the worldviews that are brought together, the more profound the controversy, the more shocking the claim, the more potential for truth the work carries (hence the intentional "offense" or outrageous "scandal" of the Five Ms, those five forbidden substances or acts that constitute the antinomian heart of "left-handed" or radical Śākta Tantric ritual). The power (*śakti*) of the work, then,

resides not in its ability to reproduce or represent one or another of the worldviews, but in the emotional tension, cognitive paradox, and cross-cultural "crossing over" that the method enacts to snap us out of our collective illusions and help us see something deeper about our shared humanity.

TURNING A SPECTACLE INTO A MIRROR

Before I close, allow me to apply some of these ideas about identity and scholarship to the case of *Kālī's Child*, the book with which I began. Seen in the light of the present volume, perhaps the most fundamental scandal of that book—a scandal that I embrace as a kind of exemplary or instructive public spectacle[23]—is not the one involving the erotic. Perhaps it has more to do with the fact that the developed forms of these ideas about mystical homoeroticism and sexual trauma—so potentially revolutionary for how we read these specific Bengali texts and this iconic figure—did not originate in the present with an Indian writer or with some privileged religious access or ethnic identity via an official initiation, a guru, a *mantra*, a caste, or a Bengali pedigree. Rather, they arose—and probably only *could* have arisen in just this way—within a ridiculously obvious "outsider" in deep and respectful, even mystical, dialogue with the textual tradition via a set of linguistic, hermeneutical, and psychoanalytic practices that are theoretically available to *anyone anywhere at any time*.

Such a democratic epistemology, of course, is fundamentally impossible within the social frameworks of most traditional models of religious authority, experience, and knowledge (devotion presumes both hierarchy and submission, and the guru, God, or pontiff is often very much a monarch), and the very notion that one can know something deep and important about another culture that the culture itself would broadly reject is only something to be deeply suspicious of within certain distortions of postcolonial theory, which can only seem to read a convincing idea as a colonizing one (Marxist theory excepted, of course). The cross-cultural advancement of new knowledge and new paradigms simply is not supposed to happen that way. Or at least it should not happen that way. *But sometimes it does.*

We might say, then, that the deepest scandal of *Kālī's Child* is its absolute, if still implicit, denial of ethnicity, religious identity, or cultural citizenship as adequate criteria of historical or even mystical truth. I certainly never intended such a conclusion when I was writing the book, but the dramatically ethnocentric nature of the responses I have since received has made me see that this in fact is one of the book's

most important implications and probably the deepest source of the controversies that so anxiously surround it, as if somehow to contain, control, or at least shame it into silence. And indeed, how many times have I heard something like the following between the lines, as it were, of my offended critics: “How could *this Westerner* see something that we Hindus have not seen for the last 130 years? What hubris!”

On one level, I can only agree with them—it does indeed seem quite preposterous. But what am I to do? I cannot cognitively or morally deny the conclusions of my intellectual labors; I am completely persuaded by them and could only pretend otherwise through an act of pure deceit. But I also cannot question the sincerity of my Hindu critics or deny the depth of their own pain at realizing just how at odds our readings are and how serious indeed are the implications of these differences. I am left, then, with two inescapable conclusions: (1) there is no necessary relationship between religious identity or belief and the truths of historical-critical scholarship; and (2) the latter will often flatly contradict the former.

Often, but not always. *Kālī’s Child*, after all, has also been warmly embraced by some Hindus, and much of it consists of demonstrations that its ideas are not in actual fact as foreign to the Hindu tradition as one might at first believe. It all depends on *which* Hindu traditions we are talking about. For example, I went to great pains to show that the Bengali textual record is filled with observations that we can easily read today as homoerotic insights, and that profound indigenous resources for a sexual reading can be mined from the myths, symbols, doctrines, and ritual practices of Śākta Tantra. In other words, I went to great lengths to show that I am *not* the first to see these things.

The problem, of course, is that these original indigenous resources have all been more or less ignored, forgotten, or actively suppressed (and hence my work effectively began with the quite empirical discovery that the English translation of one central Bengali text had bowdlerized or even omitted entire passages on the sexual content of Ramakrishna’s experiences). My alleged “originality” or “hubris” (take your pick), in other words, is largely an illusion, being mostly a function of the tradition’s own censorship and denial of its own occulted face, that is, the Tantra.[24] Hence my erotic observations look outrageous to the historically uninformed, when in fact they are remarkably in line with both many aspects of the (censored) textual record and the earlier “subaltern” readings of Ramakrishna—that is, the Tantric ones—that had been effectively suppressed by the hegemonic forces of colonialism, Brahmanical orthodoxy, neo-Vedanta, and any number of imported Victorian sensibilities.

Numerous historians of religion have noted that nineteenth-century India witnessed a systematic suppression of Tantric traditions as the latter encountered the Western sensibilities of the colonial authorities, the Christian missionaries, and the Indian reformers anxious to establish Hinduism as an ethically viable world religion. Historically speaking, such polemical patterns were in fact ancient and indigenous ones on the subcontinent—Tantric culture had undergone an internal major reformation in eleventh-century Kashmir,[25] and Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, and Christian Indian writers had all been ridiculing and shaming Tantrikas for centuries before the British arrived on India's shores[26]—but colonial contact clearly exacerbated these same processes, hence the gradual domestication, "sweetening," or censorship of Tantric motifs that numerous historians have noted as a defining feature of nineteenth-century Bengal, where much of the British-Indian encounter was focused during this period.[27]

Seen again in this historical light, a psychoanalytically informed hermeneutic that zooms in on Tantric themes and hermeneutical practices within South Asian religious history ceases to be a nefarious form of "neocolonialism" and becomes instead an intellectually responsible project of recovery and remembrance of the precolonial and subaltern, a perfect historiographical example of what Freud once called the return of the repressed. Ironically, then, it is the contemporary offense taken to my work on the Tantric underpinnings of Ramakrishna's mysticism that is properly "colonial," not the work itself; both that offense and the attempted censorship, after all, have unmistakable colonial pedigrees. This, of course, hardly alleviates the scandal, since Tantra is itself often intentionally "scandalous" and few people really want to confront the repressed, but at least such a broad historical perspective calls into serious question the supposed cultural structure and direction of my reading (with a colonizing West misrepresenting India).

Certainly it is hardly a mystery why some groups would want to repress such a dangerous memory, for Tantric practices and doctrines "threaten the purity regulations that have always been the basis for high-caste social constructions of the self" (White, 2003: 219); that is, they "melt down" some of the deepest structures of orthodox Hinduism. But, obviously, such psychological threats are meaningless to scholars of Western descent, whose senses of self are constructed by quite different sociopolitical processes and for whom Indian purity codes are human social constructions that call for critical analysis and sociological understanding, certainly not conservative censorship and ideological control.

Such a colonial suppression of Tantra and attending politics of "identity correctness" and "cultural purity" may also help explain another conspicuous feature of the controversies surrounding *Kālī's Child*, namely, the fact that my critics have been so strangely silent about any number of Indian intellectuals who have addressed the homoerotic dimensions of Ramakrishna's life both well before and after me.[28] This phenomenon of convenient silence makes good sense because in the end it is not my ideas that are the most troubling feature of all of this; it is my skin color and the accident of my birth. It is, in other words, the fact that these truths were spoken by an ethnic outsider that constitutes the deepest scandal.

This, of course, is a variation on the "one hundred million Hindus cannot be wrong" argument, which works astonishingly like the "one hundred million Christians cannot be wrong" thesis (remember evolution and the Scopes trial?) or the "one hundred million Muslims cannot be wrong" position (*jihad* as a primarily internal or psychological category?). *Which* Hindus, *which* Christians, *which* Muslims? In any case, it turns out that they *can* all be wrong, and this for a very simple reason: ethnic or religious identity carries absolutely no necessary intellectual force and in many cases actually works against free radical inquiry and probable historical conclusion. Consequently, not being an ethnic, cultural, or religious insider hardly dooms one's discourse to falsity; quite the contrary (but neither does it guarantee the truth of one's positions).

In the end, intellectual power and freedom can only be had by the usual academic means: intense study, unrestricted, uncensored public discussion, the freedom to speak any truth *and* make any mistake, rational argument, and developed theory. Ethnicity, political ideology, or religious identity can carry no necessary intellectual privilege here—absolutely none. That, anyway, is the scandalous, nondual, essentially mystical truth for which I have become a willing spectacle.

I began my trip to Denver on a plane learning about an Indologist who used an English pseudonym in order to hide the fact that "his" textual knowledge in fact belonged to a Bengali Tantric pundit. I ended my trip on another plane retracing our previous flight pattern recalling a close colleague, touchingly concerned to protect me from yet more abuse, who had quite seriously suggested in Denver that I use an Indian Sanskrit pseudonym (Jñāna Kṛpālu) in my future writings to hide the fact that my thoughts all flow from a quite American mind. This struck me as highly significant, although I was deeply skeptical that that name would hide anything. In the colonial context, one had to

assert an English pedigree and hide one's Indian soul (or colleague) to garner respect and prestige as an orientalist. In the present postcolonial context, one sometimes has to pretend to be Indian and hide or deny one's Western identity to be accepted as a legitimate Indologist and *avoid* being called an "orientalist." The human stakes are now infinitely lower and the direction of the prejudice has reversed, but the same cultural dualism, the same racist logic, the same destructive game continues in a new form: we have hence not yet really got to the "post" of postcolonial and are still trapped in the "colonial."

I take Woodroffe's early retirement from India, his final fourteen years in England and Europe, his rather depressive condition that appears in the photos and upon which Taylor has sensitively commented, and his rebaptism back into Catholicism late in life as all significant here. I suspect strongly that there were powerful subjective psychological reasons for all of these events that further historiographical and biographical research might uncover, but until then I would like to take them as symbolic of what I fear will happen to many Westerners, including myself, who attempt to study deeply Indic spiritualities like Śākta Tantra without a much greater appreciation and respect for our own Western identities and forms of reflexivity. Linguistic knowledge, even dramatic instances of being turned outside-in such as *śakti-pāta*—that "direct transmission of a state of mystical awareness from guru to disciple" (*Woodroffe,* 103)—are not enough. The texts and transmissions must be used creatively. Put differently, representation of the tradition's own self-understanding is simply insufficient, and the true fruit of *śakti-pāta* is not faithful reproduction but cultural transformation and radical translation through our own forms of consciousness, political and ethical values, psychological insights, and psychosexual patterns.

Here I am reminded of the late Ninian Smart, who once suggested (I know not where) that the ideal Buddhologist would be a Westerner who was a Buddhist in a former life. This same idea is captured in fact by Kathleen Taylor's subtitle, wisely transformed from its original assertion from the pen of M. P. Pandit ("He is truly an Indian Soul in a European body" [*Woodroffe,* epigram]) into an open-ended question: "An Indian Soul in a European Body?" Except for their unfortunate and troublingly consistent soul-body dualisms and implicit orientalist structures (with an "Eastern soul" residing in a "Western body"), such metaphors capture well what I myself am trying to say: a profound understanding of Hindu Tantra lies not only "there" in South Asia, nor "here" in the American university, but also between the two, melted down within a single human life. Each existential

position produces a different kind of understanding, and each is worth having.

Perhaps, then, as Westerners, it is finally time *both* to bid farewell to all those colonial dimensions of Arthur Avalon that made it necessary to suppress the profound work of a Bengali colleague and friend *and* to dispense with all those racist postcolonial conflations of identity and truth that make our own present Western identities and integrities so suspect. Perhaps it is finally time to practice simply "being John Woodroffe," that is, to become what we already are, *ourselves*, and realize in the process, with a start perhaps, that even in the case of individuals the plural ("ourselves") is happily appropriate, that every "John Woodroffe" really is a kind of "Arthur Avalon," that is, a self that comes to know its own occulted face in the reflecting mirror of the other, spectacle and all.

NOTES

1. Don Cupitt, *Mysticism after Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 97, 56; hereafter cited in text.
2. Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Kālī's Child: The Mystical and the Erotic in the Life and Teachings of Ramakrishna* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); hereafter cited in text as *Kālī's Child.*
3. Brian Hatcher, "Kali's Problem Child: Another Look at Jeffrey Kripal's Study of Sri Ramakrishna," *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 3:1 (1999): 165–182.
4. Sudhir Kakar, *Ecstasy* (New Delhi: Viking, 2001).
5. See Jeffrey J. Kripal, "Pale Plausibilities: A Preface for the Second Edition," in *Kālī's Child: The Mystical and the Erotic in the Life and Teachings of Ramakrishna* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); "Mystical Homoeroticism, Reductionism, and the Reality of Censorship: A Response to Gerald James Larson," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 66:3 (1998): 627–635; hereafter cited as "Response"; "A Garland of Talking Heads for the Goddess: Some Personal and Theoretical Reflections on the Western Kali," in *Is the Indian Goddess a Feminist? The Politics of South Asian Goddess,* ed. Alf Hiltebeitel and Kathleen M. Erndl (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); *Roads of Excess, Palaces of Wisdom: Eroticism and Reflexivity in the Study of Mysticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); hereafter cited in text as *Roads*; Letters, *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 30:1 (Spring 2001): 35; "Secret Talk: Sexual Identity and the Politics of the Study of Hindu Tantrism," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 29:4 (Winter 2001): 14–17; "Sexuality, Textuality, and the Future of the Past: A Response to Swami Tyagananda," *Evam: Forum on Indian Representations* 1:1–2 (2002): 191–205; "The Tantric Truth of the Matter: A Forthright Response to Rajiv Malhotra," posted at http://www.sulekha.com (on September 21, 2002); hereafter cited as "The Tantric Truth"; and "Teaching the Hindu Tantra with Freud: Transgression as Critical Theory and Mystical Technique," in *Teaching Freud,* ed. Diane Jonte-Pace (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). Many of these essays are available at http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~kalischir.
6. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978).
7. J. J. Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment*: *The Encounter between Asian and Western Thought* (London: Routledge, 1997), 8; hereafter cited in text as Clarke, 1997.
8. Daniel Gold, *Aesthetics and Analysis in Writing on Religion: Modern Fascinations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 38–39; hereafter cited in text.

9. Much of the present section was originally written for *International Journal of Hindu Studies* (2003) as part of a book review of Taylor's text. My thanks to Sushil Mittal for his kind permission to reproduce this material in this new context.
10. Kathleen Taylor, *Sir John Woodroffe, Tantra and Bengal: "An Indian Soul in a European Body?"* (Richmond, UK: Curzon Press, 2001); hereafter cited in text as *Woodroffe.*
11. Significantly, the most intimate details occur in a hagiographic biography of Sivacandra, not from Woodroffe's own pen. Moreover, Taylor insightfully and correctly notes that the experience has been modeled textually on that of Vivekananda under Ramakrishna's foot (103). I nevertheless take it as certainly possible, largely because I experienced something similar, if not identical, on the very same night eighty-three years later (Kripal, *Roads* 199–206).
12. *Program Guide* for 2001 Annual Meetings, American Academy of Religion, Society of Biblical Literature, Denver, Colorado, November 17–20, 2001, p. 106.
13. T. G. Vaidyanathan and Jeffrey J. Kripal, eds., *Vishnu on Freud's Desk: A Reader in Psychoanalysis and Hinduism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).
14. Mark D. Jordan, *The Silence of Sodom: Homosexuality in Modern Catholicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).
15. This is complicated somewhat by my sexual-trauma thesis, which may have in fact been the deeper source of the first panel's offended feelings (and which was not discussed in this third panel), but I cannot possibly say for sure, since my ideas were never actually discussed on the first panel. Moreover, I know from years of debate and dialogue that the homoerotic hypothesis is more than sufficient grounds for offense, with or without the sexual-trauma thesis. Hence my point here stands.
16. Such a homoerotic reading of Jesus is becoming increasingly powerful and increasingly relevant to the debates surrounding *Kālī's Child.* Morton Smith, *The Secret Gospel: The Discovery and Interpretation of the Secret Gospel According to Mark* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973); Robert Goss, *Jesus Acted Up: A Gay and Lesbian Manifesto* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993); Robert Goss, *Queering Christ: Beyond Jesus Acted Up* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2002); Theodore Jennings, Jr., *The Man Jesus Loved: Homoerotic Narratives in the New Testament* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2003); Marvin Meyer, *Secret Gospels: Essays on Thomas and the Secret Gospel of Mark* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003).
17. I have described and analyzed these dimensions of my self-understanding and scholarship in some detail in *Roads of Excess*, where I explore a set of mystico-erotic experiences catalyzed, I argue, by a tensive bringing together of "insider" (hermeneutical/religious) and "outsider" (social-scientific/psychoanalytic) perspectives. Again, it is the tension of the Third, not traditional "belief" or explanatory "reduction," that yields the most profound insight for me.
18. See Georges Bataille, *Erotisim: Death & Sensuality* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1986); *Kālī's Child;* Sarah Caldwell, *Oh Terrifying Mother: Sexuality, Violence and Worship of the Goddess Kāli* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999); Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).
19. Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 237.
20. Authenticity and authority, however, are not quite the same thing. Authenticity, I would suggest, is primarily a psychological reality or tone, whereas authority is socially defined. One can, then, feel (and so be) entirely "authentic" and yet have no socially recognized "authority." I would not, however, want to make too much of this distinction, since psychological experience is also socially constructed, and social practices can and do arise from psychological convictions.
21. I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession* (London: Routledge, 1971).

22. This summary is deeply indebted to José Cabezón, whose paraphrase of my essay I have more or less stolen *verbatim* here to summarize its relationship to the other essays of this volume.
23. I am indebted for this notion of scandal as instructive spectacle to Laurie Patton's keynote address at the University of Illinois Humanities Center's conference on "The Fate of the Secular Study of Religion," in which she reflects on the work of Harjot Oberoi, Sam Gill, and the present author; Laurie Patton, "Schools and Scandals: Notes on Life in the Study of Religion," unpublished manuscript, 2003.
24. David Gordon White, *The Kiss of the Yoginī: "Tantric Sex" in Its South Asian Contexts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).
25. David Gordon White, *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
26. Cynthia Anne Humes, "Wrestling with Kālī: South Asian and British Constructions of the Dark Goddess," in *Encountering Kālī: In the Margins, at the Center, in the West,* ed. Rachel Fell McDermott and Jeffrey J. Kripal (Berkeley: University California Press, 2003).
27. See Rachel Fell McDermott, *Mother of My Heart, Daughter of My Dreams: Kālī and Uma in the Devotional Poetry of Bengal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Hugh B. Urban, *The Economics of Ecstasy: Tantra, Secrecy and Power in Colonial Bengal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Malcolm McLean, *Devoted to the Goddess: The Life and Work of Ramprasad* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1997); and *Kālī's Child.*
28. See Sumit Sarkar, "The Kathamrita as a Text: Towards an Understanding of Ramakrishna Parmahamsa," *Occasional Papers on History and Society* 12 (New Delhi: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, 1985); Parama Roy, "As the Master Saw Her: Western Women and Hindu Nationalism," in *Indian Traffic: Identities in Question in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai, eds., *Same-Sex Love in India: Readings from Literature and History* (New York: Palgrave, 2000); and Kakar, *Ecstasy.* It is not that these authors are never the object of similar criticisms; they certainly have been. It is simply that I have never seen my critics mention them in relationship to my work or deal with this developing scholarly consensus (and this is before we even get to scholars of Western descent who have seen the same things [McLean 1983; Hatcher 1999]). But how could they? This would make complete and immediate nonsense of their claims that my readings are a product of my linguistic incompetence, Western biases, or colonial mentality. It would, in other words, melt down the dualisms of this reversed orientalism.

10

IDENTITY AS AN INTELLECTUAL PROBLEM

Kwasi Wiredu

The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus is reported to have remarked that the learning of many things does not suffice to make one wise, else Pythagoras would have been wise. Seeing that the name of the latter graces one of the best-known theorems of Euclidean geometry—I assume that every high school graduate knows this theorem—it is obvious that, on this reckoning, the stakes are high indeed when it comes to wisdom. Be that as it may, it is certain that the learning of many things at least enlarges the mind, and an enlarged mind is a critical mind. I will suggest below that one of the most important functions of a critical mind is the probing of identities. But the Heraclitean remark about knowledge and wisdom suggests a similar view about the relation between scholarship and wisdom. If scholarship is simply the learning of many things, the relations are not just similar; they are identical. The message, then, is that the class of foolish scholars is not an empty one.

But is scholarship just the learning of many things? I do not think it is necessary to strive after a categorical answer. Scholarship may in some instances be the learning of many things, but it can be much more. At worst, it is the acquisition of knowledge without any especially sublime motives. At best, however, the acquisition of knowledge connects with the concern with human welfare. This is when a scholar becomes an intellectual, a person with a well-furnished mind fully apprised of the broader significance of knowledge for human existence. But even an intellectual is not necessarily a wise person. Wisdom is a practical skill. It is

the ability to utilize knowledge and judgment for the well ordering of human relations at the personal, familial, civic, and species levels. Seen in this light, the conditions for the attainment of wisdom are both more and less exacting than those requisite for the status of an intellectual. One does not need to be learned to be wise. And a learned person may need years of apprenticeship in the living of life to develop the moral sensibilities and the ethical perspicacity essential to wisdom.

The distinction between wisdom and knowledge or intellectuality is particularly easy to see in societies, such as those in many parts of Africa, where the institutions of formal education are foreign, in origin, to the indigenous cultures. It is obvious that in such situations, circumstances pertaining to the pursuit of knowledge might have no natural linkage with local canons of virtue and good judgment. Thus, in my own country, Ghana, for instance, our traditional elders are known not to waste any time in pointing out the lack of equation between knowledge and wisdom to anybody in whom scholarship appears to induce an overweening pride. However, a lack of a natural affinity is not the same as incompatibility; and even here knowledge can go hand in hand with wisdom, or at any rate, the love of it. Note, incidentally, that notwithstanding etymology, the love of wisdom is neither an invariable nor an exclusive trait of philosophers. Any scholar may cultivate that quality of mind, and in some disciplines, perhaps, more successfully than in philosophy. Whatever the discipline concerned, when that happens, conditions are ripe for what is called committed scholarship, learning impregnated with a sense of social responsibility.

Since this narrower—and to my mind more adequate—notion of scholarship is entertained in full cognizance of traditional African culture, perhaps this is an appropriate place to pause and to say something about my own situation vis-à-vis African thought and about my identity as a scholar. As an African whose university education up to graduate studies was exclusively Western owing to the fact that it took place partly during the time of colonization and partly too soon after it, I am acutely conscious of the fact that my intellectual identity has two aspects, the indigenous and the Western. I acknowledge, for example, that my interest in symbolic logic and its philosophy is of a Western derivation. But this does not compromise, for instance, my commitment to certain conceptual schemes deriving from my African linguistic and cultural background. Indeed, it is the contention of this essay that these two aspects of my intellectual identity—the African and the Western—not only can coexist but also can mutually inform and challenge one another, to the point where the very notion of a monolithic identity becomes, if not meaningless, at the very least problematic.

In my own discipline, philosophy, this comparative and unifying approach is, for an African, unavoidable due to the colonial history hinted at above. But such a special reason is not necessary for the cultivation of an intercultural perspective in philosophy. A sufficient reason for such a perspective is that we are all inhabitants of one small planet. Unfortunately, in human history up to now there has been little intercultural dialogue. This goes without saying regarding the relationship between African philosophy and philosophy in the East or the West. Between the East and the West, there has, indeed, been more interaction; but of genuine dialogue little has transpired. In consequence, the world displays a variety of philosophies reflecting aspects of the different cultures of the world. In this situation it is tempting to suppose that philosophies have indissoluble links with those factors of life that distinguish one culture from another. In philosophy, then, if this intuition is correct, East shall remain East, West, West, and Africa, Africa. Such cultural particularism in philosophy, however, will not survive the increasing prospects of dialogue inherent in the forces of globalization, for good or bad. That dialogue and particularism do not cohere will be argued below. And without particularism, you do not have rigid identities in philosophical scholarship. The same is true of all responsible scholarship.

IDENTITY AND THE COMMITMENTS OF SCHOLARSHIP

Scholarship, as I have claimed, should be responsible, but responsible to what? Any scholar is a native of some country. By virtue of this, she belongs to one culture or another. She also belongs to a race.[1] This last is an identity that in some cases may come with a baggage of oppressive consequences. Consider, for example, the particular identity of being black. Not only have people of this description been afflicted with the historical adversities of slavery and colonialism, but they also continue to be visited, in the contemporary world, with the aftereffects of these historical evils. Regarding this whole matter, scholarship has historically not spoken with one voice. Some glorified Western philosophers, for example, have been unabashedly racist. Such were Hume, Kant, and Hegel.[2] But even in Hume's time there were Western philosophers who saw and protested the iniquity of Hume's ways in this matter.

It is the same today. Though it is the natural responsibility of black scholars to unravel the fallacies of antiblack racism, it is the moral responsibility of scholars of all other pigmentation to oppose such racism, at least wherever the opportunity presents itself. More generally, of course, it is the bounden duty of scholarship to oppose racism

of whatever stripe. True to this imperative, criticism of racism among contemporary intellectuals has known no racial limits with respect to its authors or targets.

Committed scholarship has a still more daunting duty with respect to the play of identities in world affairs. Contemporary conflicts among nations or cultures are frequently bedeviled by opposing religious inflexibilities. These are nothing short of rigid identities anchored in deepest emotion. The problem is that some religions are avowedly dogmatic and unsympathetic to the rational probing of identities. I use "dogmatic" in this context in the technical sense of professing an institutionally guarded set of articles of faith considered as the sine qua non of eschatological salvation. Such beliefs are frequently not only unbeholden to rational inquiry but also antagonistic to it. At the best of times, to be sure, such attitudes are an impediment to dialogue. In our volatile times they are a threat to our very survival. Scholars of rival religious identities can at least offer the world the model of peaceful dialogue among themselves. In this they would only be practicing the precept of rational inquiry, which is a presupposition of all true scholarship. By such efforts perhaps they can influence people and politicians in the direction of dialogue, negotiation, and principled compromise in the face of world problems, national or international. No one, of course, says that this will be easy.

It is, however, not only by their example that scholars can exert such a salubrious influence on human affairs; the results of their investigations, especially in the areas of comparative philosophy and theology, can have similar effects too. Consider the notion of religion. If it were to turn out, on intercultural reflection, that it is quite a flexible notion, rigidly inclined adherents to given religions might be encouraged to be more flexible in their attitudes to religious diversities. The need for just such a conceptual flexibility is illustrated in the case of African religion.

To begin with, it is quite problematic in what sense the concept of religion is applicable to the life and thought of African peoples.[3] Certainly, if we take the Akans, for example, it is clear that if they are to be described as having a religion, then it can consist only of the belief and trust in a demiurgic kind of Supreme Being. No institutions of worship are found and no tendency toward evangelization can be detected. Hence, for example, the idea of a religious war does not even make sense.

Reflection about African religions, then, raises questions about the concept of religion itself. Many African religions are nondogmatic. This is connected with the fact that they are not institutional at all.

There are no articles of belief that one is supposed to adhere to in order to belong to any of these religions, simply because the religions are not institutions. This is one of the reasons why proselytizing religions have tended to make easy headway among Africans. These institutional religions face no real competition, even though they themselves often seem exercised about imaginary opposition, such as the practices relating to the so-called fetishes. In fact, those practices do not amount to a religion in any reasonable sense.

Furthermore, no mechanisms of moral edification are attached to the religions in question. Morality in the cultures concerned is not a matter of religion but of relationship with kith, kin, and kind. Moral training, therefore, or the reinforcement of morals belongs to home, lineage, and society at large. In the absence of worship, such things as articles of faith or clerical officialdom lose their raison d'être, and the distinction itself between the secular and the religious becomes at least attenuated. It is well known that reflection about some Eastern religions also precipitates similar thoughts. In view of both situations, it is apparent that any definition of religion that can expect to have any claim to comprehensiveness will have to be extremely minimal. It would seem also, though this is pure guesswork, that religions that are amenable to only a minimal definition are the ones that are least resistant to rational dialogue. Identities in such cases are, accordingly, more flexible.

To pursue the example of the Akans further, their flexibility in the matter of religious identity is remarkable. Great numbers of them have formally embraced Christianity. But despite apparent conceptual incongruities, many of them have retained their indigenous worldview. Conceptual incongruities do indeed need to be resolved, but I have always found the underlying openness of mind attractive.

But let us return to our broader discussion of identity. What of the political and cultural sources of identity? On these bases a scholar may be identified, say, as Nigerian or Chinese or French, and so on. Other bases of possible identification are philosophical, ideological, religious (as just noted), professional, or recreational, and so on. Hence a person may be a Ghanaian who is a philosopher of a persuasion combining elements of Ghanaian traditional with modern Western thought. Let us suppose that he is a non-Marxist socialist by ideology, an atheist by faith or, more strictly, by nonfaith, and an enthusiast of both Ghanaian popular music and modern jazz by way of recreation. These descriptions define multiple identities. Some of these have an internationalizing potential, others have a potentially parochial one. In both types of cases, what we have are potentialities and not ironclad laws; they are therefore open to all sorts of modifying forces. Hence, for example, the

socialists of the world may be united by basic ideology but driven asunder by antithetical patriotisms. Sometimes the multiplicity of identities creates tensions not only among individuals but also in individuals. Hence, for example, a socialist who happens to be a loyal citizen of a capitalist county at war with a socialist country may find that his socialism is in agonizing tension with his patriotism.

Let us tarry awhile on this reference to patriotism. If we understand patriotism as love of country, as distinct from unsober devotion to it, it may be taken to define a primary sphere of responsibility. A scholar's responsibility, then, may be conceived, just like charity, to begin at home. But it assuredly does not end there; it expands—or should expand—to the outer circumference of the entire race of human beings. Such a breadth of orientation is clearly facilitated by the broadness of mind that can result from the learning of many things. Seen in this light, national identity need not—should not—limit the scope of a scholar's sense of responsibility.

But there are some constraints on the universality of outlook just alluded to arising from various identities that we bear through natural causes; and they can be so subtle as to be almost imperceptible. For that reason, they can be extraordinarily difficult to deal with. National identity comes, in general, with a cultural identity. It is difficult to exaggerate the role of this form of identity in the formation of a human person. We are born human beings by virtue of our biology and inherited potentials, but we become persons only by socialization. This is the process by which we not only develop the powers of our mind but also, more importantly, begin to have any sort of mind at all. In other words, we are not born with a mind that is a tabula rasa, as the seventeenth-century British empiricist philosopher John Locke suggested. Rather we are born with only the potential for one. The acquisition, through suckling, nursing, and nurturing by parents or persons in loco parentis, of the gestured rudiments of language is the first hint of a baby's pretension to mind. Even this much is already heavily laden with culture, that is, with a certain particular way of becoming sensitive to "the other" and subsequently cognizant of the self. In due course, one acquires a working command of a mother tongue.

LANGUAGE AS AN ASPECT OF IDENTITY: THE CASE OF ENGLISH AND COGNATE LANGUAGES

Embedded in any linguistic resource is a world outlook. By this I mean the combination of a worldview and a sense of right and wrong. The essentials of a worldview consist of the fundamental concepts in terms

of which any sort of cognition is possible. Of these the most fundamental is the concept of object in general. To possess the concept of object in general is to have the capacity, not necessarily articulate, to identify and reidentify items in experience. This level of conceptualization is pretty close to the reign of instinct in human life. With respect to it, therefore, there is little differentiation among us as featherless bipeds dispersed over the surface of the world.

As soon, however, as we come to even the most rudimentary ordering of the items of reference in our experience, disparities emanating from time, place, and inner conditions begin to come into play, even if they do not leap to the eye. The following (thinking in English) are some basic concepts involved in the organizing of our experience into basically coherent perceptions. We perceive objects as situated in space and events as occurring in time. More or less invariably, the explanation of events is cast in terms of the law of cause and effect. In discourse we represent ourselves as talking about things and their properties and our statements about them are true or false in virtue of their accordance or lack of accordance with fact. We speak of some things as existing and others as not existing, and do not seem to have any special difficulty in conceiving of the possibility that nothing might have existed, thus envisaging the possibility of absolute nothingness.

Of the things that exist some are characterized as concrete, others as abstract; some are characterized as physical, others as spiritual; and of the events that happen, some are seen as natural, others as supernatural—a distinction that frequently facilitates the postulation of a being of the same description. In talking of beings, there are some distinctions that appear to be of cardinal importance. We earlier touched by implication on the distinction between self and others. Our conception of ourselves as rational animals seems customarily to entail the notion that we are not just bodies but also beings possessed of mind or soul or spirit. The concepts of soul and spirit naturally invite reference to the distinction between the religious and the secular and, in some circles, the mystical and the nonmystical.

In the matter of morality, there is a variety of concepts for the evaluation of human conduct. A question that is apt to arise in this context is whether the canons of evaluation are local or universal or a mixture of both. In other words, the question is whether the values expressed in our evaluations are relative to local conditions or have an objective standing or are selectively one or the other. There is also the question of how morality and religion are, or ought to be, related.

For ease of reference, let me make a quick listing of the concepts and distinctions explicitly or implicitly alluded to above. We have

mentioned space and time, cause and effect, things and their properties, truth and falsity, fact and fiction, being and nothingness, mind and matter, body and soul. We have also noted the distinctions between the concrete and the abstract, the physical and the spiritual, the natural and the supernatural, the rational and the nonrational, the mystical and the nonmystical, the religious and the secular, and the ethical and the conventional.

It is a remarkable fact that the intelligibility of most of these concepts and distinctions is not universal to all cultures. If one has been brought up on the modes of conceptualization embedded in the English language or its cognates, it may well seem axiomatic, for example, that a thing is either physical or spiritual or that something is either natural or supernatural. Or, more strictly, it may not occur to one that such a question might be raised at all. One might, indeed, be capable of considering the possibility that, for example, there are no spiritual entities. One might even be a materialist. But this is distinct from the notion that the very idea of something being either physical or spiritual is lacking in sense. We behold here, I suggest, the workings of a particular cultural identity. Simply by being a native English speaker, one inherits a certain conceptual predisposition. One need not have dabbled in philosophy or theology at all for one's mind to be furnished with the conceptual framework or configuration of conceptual frameworks in question. So deep is the influence of language on thought-habits.[4]

That so basic a distinction as that between the physical and the spiritual in English and cognate languages may not be applicable outside its own linguistic boundaries is not peculiar to that class of languages. Any alternative conceptual framework residing in another language or family of languages may be connected with its linguistic habitat in a similar way: its intelligibility may be accordingly circumscribed. If I had been speaking in Akan, my own language, the list of concepts and distinctions given above would certainly have been different. It would have been different not just in the sense of using different words to express the same concepts but rather in the sense of expressing, in some cases at least, nonequivalent concepts.

AKAN LANGUAGE AND ITS CONCEPTUAL WORLDVIEW

To bring some concreteness to these abstract remarks and also to substantiate the claim that the list given above is not universal, let me now, even while speaking in English, try to think aloud in Akan. The most fundamental considerations revolve around the concept of existence. In

Akan, to say that something exists, we say *(e)wo ho*. The word *ho* means "there, at some place," and is an essential part of the existential expression. On the other hand, *wo* in isolation means nothing. It is like the English word "then." By itself, it means nothing, but as part of the particle "if-then," it is meaningful, signifying conditionality. Logicians call such words "syncategorematic." Because *wo* is syncategorematic, the word *ewo* is radically unlike the English phrase "it is," which can express on its own the thought that some thing exists. In Akan, then, the spatiality indicator *ho* is essential for expressing the notion of existence. In other words, in this medium the concept of existence is locative.

The locative character of existence in Akan has far-reaching reverberations in Akan thought.[5] If existence is spatial, the notion of a spiritual substance does not make sense. A spiritual substance is, by definition, a nonspatial substance. Therefore the notion of the existence of such a substance is contradictory. The same goes for mind, soul, and spirit if these are conceived in the Cartesian manner as spiritual substances. Since nonexistence in the Akan language is the there-not-being-something-there, it too is spatial. Therefore the metaphysical notion of absolute nothingness is not coherent therein either. Furthermore, if the notion of absolute nothingness is incoherent, then so also is the notion of creation out of nothing. Hence any indigenous notion of a Supreme Being among the Akans would most likely not be of an ex nihilo creator.

Consider also the idea of a thing and its properties. In a lot of Western metaphysics from the ancient past to the present, this is regarded as an ontological distinction, not just a grammatical one of a subject and its predicates.[6] It is hard (from an Akan standpoint) not to be assailed by the suspicion that this might be ontology imitating grammar. The interesting thing for us here, however, is that if there is an imitation game being played here, it is being played with the encouragement of the English language at the level of common discourse. It seems extremely natural in English to say that when we see a brown table, what we have in view is a concrete entity (the table) with an abstract entity (brownness) inhering in it. One is therefore prone to think that of the things that exist, some are "concrete" and others are abstract. The way is then effortlessly opened for all manner of metaphysical constructs in a realm of abstract entities.

The Akan language opens up no such metaphysical avenue. We do, indeed, have a way of talking about things and their properties, but that does not translate into a differentiation of kinds of entities. A thing in Akan is simply an *ade*, and its properties are simply what it is like. It is

obvious, even at a prephilosophical level of reflection, that to construe what a thing is like, its ways of being, as another kind of entity is to compromise intelligibility very severely. Moreover, if properties were any sort of entities, in Akan they would have to have locations. That makes scant sense. A brown table can be at some location. But if brownness itself could be a localized entity, we would have to say, in defiance of all logic, that it is an entity that can be in different places at one and the same time. Another side of the incoherence is that if a property like brownness were an abstract entity that existed at some place, it would be a determinate entity, a particular, thus contradicting its status as a "universal." A universal is an item of discourse that is applicable to a number, possibly infinite, of objects. Brownness, obviously a universal, could not, on pain of inconsistency, also be an entity or object.

What of the natural-supernatural distinction? It should be easy to anticipate that it is not going to be easy to find accommodation for such a distinction in an intuitive ontology in which to exist is to be spatial. If, as in the ontology embedded in the Akan language, all beings, objects, and events are spatiotemporal, then invoking any transcendent sources of intervention in the affairs of this world is not an option. But without some such intervention, there is nothing supernatural; the concept does not even arise. It is similarly obvious that a locatively oriented ontology is not such as to germinate so much as the distinction between the mystical and the nonmystical. It will emerge below, moreover, that the sense in which the concept of religion applies to Akan traditional life and thought is so minimal as not to provide any institutional underpinnings for the distinction between the religious and the secular.

Significant disparities have now been disclosed between Akan and English regarding most of the metaphysical concepts listed earlier on. Let us now consider in a general way the significance of these disparities for intercultural as well even as intracultural scholarship. In all this we must bear in mind that the differences noted are not differences of philosophical conclusions. They are simply the results of tendencies immanent in the languages concerned. As tendencies, they incline the mind toward certain ways of thought but, to adapt a Leibnizian phraseology, they do not necessitate them. Nevertheless, as tendencies, they do define intellectual identities, so that what we have in the disparities recounted above is a conflict of identities.

RECONCILING DIFFERENCES, DISSOLVING IDENTITIES

How may such disparities be resolved? Or are they resolvable at all? Such reconciliation is, of course, important to the scholarly enterprise,

especially to religious studies and to philosophy. If linguistic identity is an insuperable barrier (1) to understanding cultures other than our own; and (2) to assessing their claims, then clearly there is an aspect of identity that delimits scholarship at a most fundamental level: the level of language.

The following reasoning for a negative answer to the question of the possibility of reconciling the disparities has seemed plausible to some thinkers: The different conceptual tendencies are all relative to given cultures. Any attempt to evaluate them will have to employ some neutral conceptual criteria. Yet any criteria actually used will themselves be relative to some culture and therefore not neutral. It follows that any attempt at evaluation would grievously beg the question.

There is something deeply wrong with this argument. It should be noted immediately that it takes in vain the human capacity for self-criticism. Just as one can comment on the syntax of one's language within the language itself, one can scrutinize one's conceptual framework using the conceptual resources of one's intellect.[7] The human mind is intrinsically self-reflexive, though perhaps not as accurate in self-reflection as it can be in reflection concerning other things and persons. Actually, the principles of evaluation involved in the critique of others are the same as those involved in the critique of the self. The proposition "P" is true or false and the argument "P, Q, . . . therefore R" is correct or incorrect on identical principles, whether it originates from my thinking or that of others.

But are there not principles of reasoning that are peculiar to some cultures? If by "peculiar" to a culture we mean something like "known to and employed by that culture alone up to now," the answer is positive but of no consequence. If a principle is employed by one culture, it can be employed or evaluated by another at some point of time or another. There is no language that one group of humans can speak and another cannot learn. In this sense there are no private languages. Further there is no principle that one people can understand and another cannot, as a matter of logical impossibility, given the right motivation and ample opportunity. These claims are based on general principles as well as empirical facts. It is enough, from the general standpoint, to note that language is a system of rules, and a human being is a rule-following animal.

There are two kinds of relevant rules, namely, rules of syntax and rules of semantics. The latter are the rules that relate symbolism, by and large, to the external world. The same five senses are responsible in all of us for our sensitivity to the external world, which is the same for all in terms of physics. It is through our ability to interact with our

environment in a lawlike manner that we are able to acquire the concept of object in general to which reference was made early in this discussion. The fundamental law of this interaction is what the eighteenth-century British philosopher David Hume[8] called "custom." This is the instinct by which constant conjunctions of types of stimuli in our experience lead us to expect similar conjunctions in the future. It is an instinct that, as Hume pointed out, is common not only to the entire race of human beings but also to the lower animals. It is what, given the information-processing power of our brains, enables us to learn from experience. We might call it the basis of the principle of induction. It is important to note that it is not offered as the principle of induction but rather as its basis. Ignorance of this distinction or inattention to it, by the way, has encouraged the standard criticism of Hume to the effect that he reduces reasoning to mere habit. It is not necessary to pursue this matter here, but it is important to emphasize the species-wide commonality of custom. This is what underlies the possibility of empirical reasoning among all the different tribes of humankind. It also, therefore, underlies the possibility of interpersonal and intercultural understanding.

Or, more strictly, it is custom together with our basic sense of consistency and structure that makes it possible for all humans to reason and to relate with one another. It is in virtue of the sense of consistency that we are able to distinguish between assertion and denial. This discrimination is codified in the principle of noncontradiction, which forbids the assertion and denial of one and the same proposition at one and the same time. Without some adherence to this principle, communication is impossible. Not even language—and therefore not even thinking—is possible in the unmitigated absence of that principle.[9] The same is true of the sense of structure. It is in virtue of this endowment that we are able to recognize recurrent patterns of discourse. It would be impossible without it to recognize the syntactic appropriateness of a piece of discourse or the validity of an argument, to the disadvantage of all prospects of communication. Again let it be emphasized that these conditions and the principles that embody them are common to humankind. That is why it is possible for individuals, groups, and cultures to communicate; which brings us to the empirical basis of our position. It is an empirical fact that no one can conceal from himself or others that human beings everywhere on this earth do actually communicate on suitable (or sometimes unsuitable) occasions; and they do discuss everything—work, leisure, recreation, politics, religion, metaphysics. Such interaction presupposes the commonality of basic criteria of thought and communication and therefore of scholarship.

I use the word "basic" advisedly. We might also use the word "primary" to describe the common principles and conditions presupposed by the possibility of interpersonal and intercultural discussion. It is necessary to distinguish between these and what we might call secondary principles and modes of reasoning. The latter are further principles and modes of thought that are used in particular disciplines or employed in the ordinary thinking of particular individuals, groups, or cultures. There is a great diversity of such ways of thinking, and there can be great differences or conflicts among them. But because of the universality of the primary conditions and principles of thought and communication, any conflicts and disparities are open, in principle, to resolution.

With these thoughts in mind, let us return to the conceptual disparities earlier noted between the Akan language and English. The differences are fundamental relative to the particular systems of discourse compared. But from a more global standpoint, they are secondary. Take, then, the example of the concept of existence. In Akan, as noted, existence is locative. The point is quite clear. In English, on the other hand, it appears not to be locative. Or, the point is not maximally clear. It is possible to argue that the formulation of the concept of existence in English by means of the locution "there is" is the primary way of expressing existence. In that case, one might suggest that the word "there" in the phrase indicates a spatial connotation. So existence is locative in English after all! This is, however, likely to evoke resistance. It might be pointed out that in English there is at least the appearance of a broader meaning. And some have in fact suggested that the apparently spatial understanding of existence, as expressed in the phrase "there is," is an early phase in the evolution of the concept of existence within the English language. This evolution has presumably culminated in a more advanced concept of existence untrammeled by a spatial limit.

On this line of thought, the locative conception of existence is too narrow. It is, for example, incapable of expressing abstract existence. Numbers are abstract entities. The number 7, for example, is not just the numeral "7." It is the entity designated by the numeral, which is merely a stylized coloration on paper, when written, or a sound in the ear, when uttered. The entity thus designated is, of course, not a material object. It exists not in space but in a realm of its own: that is, the realm of abstract entities.

The locative conception of existence, the argument might continue, cannot handle spiritual existence either. Spirits also exist, but not in space. Our own existence proves the necessity for recognizing spiritual

existence, for we most assuredly have minds, and they do not exist in space. It seems, then, that both abstract and spiritual existence are essential elements of any sophisticated reflection about reality and human experience.

If these arguments (expressed in English) are sound, there is something wrong with the locative conception of existence carried by the Akan language. The arguments are intelligible in Akan; that is, they can be recast in Akan, though with some difficulty. So their force does not depend on the peculiarities of either English or Akan. An Akan with a mind fully impregnated by a conceptual framework involving the locative conception of existence, coming face to face with the critique of that conception, must realize at once that his conceptual identity is put in question. If she considers the matter with an open mind, as she should, it is not inconceivable that she might have to revise her Akan conception and broaden her understanding of the concept of existence. This means that she must realize that her identity is in fact provisional. Obviously this can be generalized for all identities that are cultural. I use the word "cultural" here in a broad sense. Being a featherless biped, for example, is not a cultural identity, but being, say, an atheist is. Any such identity is a potential problem. The potentiality becomes actual when one is faced with a critique such as the one under consideration.

Although the various concepts mentioned above—like the locative notion of existence—may be imbedded in the Akan language, this does not mean that they are intrinsically peculiar to Akans. Such notions, I think, can be understood in English and can be criticized or defended with arguments intelligible in English as well as in Akan. I call arguments of this character *independent considerations*, in that their intelligibility and force are independent of the peculiarities of the languages under consideration. I believe that independent arguments can be given in defense of the locative conception of existence found in the Akan language.[10] Similar defenses can be given for the same understanding of existence in the face of the objection based on the alleged spiritual nature of the mind. What is important in the present connection is the understanding of the general possibility and utility of independent considerations in scholarship, intercultural or otherwise. Such considerations have no pretensions to infallibility. On the contrary, they are what underlie the possibility of fruitful dialogue across identities. They also therefore underlie the fluidity of intellectual identities.

But one need not wait till somebody else initiates a critique; the elements of such a review of identities are always there, if one would but

look. The looking, however, is a habit that results only from such employments as those that engage scholars and thinkers. Scholars in such humanistic studies as theology and philosophy are especially obligated to probe their own identities. Has not an immortalized votary of one of these disciplines said that the unexamined life is not worth living? For the purposes of the recommended examination, nothing is more conducive than an intercultural and comparative approach to the investigation of fundamental intellectual presuppositions. The concepts in terms of which such presuppositions are formulated are what are called categories of thought, as already noted. The conceptual disparities between English and the Akan language noted above may therefore be called a conflict of categories. The point now is that becoming aware of alternative categories of thought automatically problematizes one's own, unless one suffers from narrow-mindedness. Ideally, scholarship should be an antidote to such a disease. Put another way, linguistic identity should not limit scholarship. And, perhaps more to the point, scholarship is precisely the vehicle through which the provincialism of linguistic identity may be overcome.

The intellectual self-examination arising from exposure to alternative categories of thought may lead to revisions of various degrees of severity in one's own categories. On the other hand, it may lead to their reaffirmation. Either way, the unexamined life has been avoided, or at any rate, steps have been taken in that direction. But it is not only because of its effects on one's mental welfare that the reexamination of one's categories of thought is so salutary but also because of the good that it can do for intercultural and even intracultural relations. It almost goes without saying that mutual understanding at the level of thought categories is likely to promote mutual understanding at other levels of human interaction. The only method of intellectual self-examination is rational reflection, which in the interpersonal theater translates into dialogue by rational discussion. This is the best alternative to violent conflict among individuals, groups, and cultures. The responsibilities of committed scholarship in this connection are obvious.

A precondition of dialogue, as rational discussion, is open-mindedness on the part of all the parties or, if any conceits of infallibility ever crossed the mind, the forswearing of any such illusions. This condition implies a willingness to learn from the other party in dialogue. There is to be an acknowledgment of the possibility that one might find that one is wrong and the other right. Such a willingness does not come easily to human beings, especially in politics, religion, and (believe it or not) philosophy. It is an attitude of mind that goes far beyond tolerance. It is only because of the rampancy of arbitrariness and narrow-mindedness

in human affairs that tolerance has seemed to be a tremendous virtue. In fact, however, it is compatible with a lack of respect for people of different identities, including, in particular, other persuasions. The willingness to learn from others, on the other hand, accords them respect as possible sources of value and insight.

To maintain this frame of mind, one does not need to minimize disagreement. There is disagreement only when the parties to dialogue hold incompatible opinions or convictions. Two positions are incompatible if and only if the truth of one implies the falsity of the other. This characterizes the initial situation of dialogue. Unless this is openly avowed, our sense of respect for our partner in dialogue does not even begin to be tested. It is when respect survives disagreement that dialogue has any hope of fruitfulness. On the plausible hypotheses that no culture has a monopoly on philosophical insight and also that no culture is utterly destitute in this regard, one can expect diversified results from respectful intercultural or, in general, interpersonal inquiry concerning intellectual issues. The inquirer is likely to find reasons to reaffirm some homegrown convictions. But conceivably, she also might come to cultivate new ones of a foreign provenance. This leads, naturally enough, to the expectation that if intercultural dialogue becomes, as it should, a widespread pursuit among scholars and other leaders of opinion, intellectual identities will lose all correspondence with cultural origins. Such identities will become fluid to the limit. That would mark the intellectual coming of age of our species.

CONCEPTUAL DECOLONIZATION

That prospect is, of course, only a distant possibility. At present there are important impediments to its realization. The Western world, for example, through colonialism and religious evangelization, sought to impose certain identities upon great masses of peoples all over the world. Colonialism is over, but we are still living in its aftermath. The net result is that what the non-Western world has to offer in the philosophical dialogue of cultures is not widely enough known or seriously enough considered. This is truer of Africa than of the Eastern world, but it is basically true of the non-Western world in general. For this reason, in some areas of the non-Western world, such as Africa, the priority for many scholars is still the affirmation rather than the reexamination of their cultural identities.

Nevertheless, a legacy of colonialism in many parts of the non-Western world is a certain unavoidable interculturalism in academic studies,

which, when rightly viewed, carries its own imperative of self-examination. Especially in Africa, during the colonial period studies of indigenous thought were carried on mainly in departments of anthropology and the study of religions and mainly by Western scholars in one metropolitan language or another. These studies were conducted within the conceptual frameworks embedded in foreign languages and resulted in accounts of African religious and philosophical thought that, in the opinion of the present writer, were seriously inaccurate by reason of conceptual incongruities.[11] Anybody who has followed the examples of conceptual disparities between Akan and English discussed earlier will be able to guess some of the incongruities.

It has only been since independence in Africa (that is, from the late fifties, sixties, and seventies of the last century) that indigenous philosophers have taken into their own hands the exposition and clarification of African thought. Although a welcome development, the mere fact that indigenous thinkers have turned their attention to African philosophy is not in itself enough to guarantee the accuracy of the material currently being produced. Ironically, indigenous philosophers have, for historical reasons, had to employ the metropolitan languages in their researches and have frequently not been able to see through the conceptual impositions implicit in the expository models established in the work of the earlier foreign scholars.

In reaction to the problems just mentioned, I have been moved to raise a call for what I have called conceptual decolonization. This is a program for removing incongruous foreign conceptual accretions from indigenous thought materials through close attention to the vernacular. The aim of the exercise is not necessarily to celebrate the indigenous conceptions when retrieved but rather to evaluate them critically and if possible to build upon them. Conceptual decolonization, then, does not amount to the indiscriminate rejection of foreign ideas or the automatic glorification of indigenous ones.

Because the decolonizing procedure is critical in approach, it necessarily involves self-examination. There consequently develops in the decolonizing consciousness an interplay of identities. There is the indigenous identity acquired through natural upbringing and informal instruction, and there is also, in many cases, a Western identity acquired through schooling in Western-style educational institutions. In Ghana, for example, most educated people are Christians. If they are philosophers, they probably also have additional indebtedness to Western thought. Inevitably they have to negotiate some harmonization of the two identities. In view of the conceptual conflicts to which attention has already been called, the process must involve quite

considerable conceptual problems. It is not clear that the average African Christian scholar has consciously confronted the problem in its full dimensions. Be that as it may, it seems fair to say that until that has been done, the responsibilities of scholarship remain unfulfilled.

CONCLUDING PARADOX

It seems, upon these reflections, that the identities we wear are best if they can, in principle, be dissolved; and scholarship is best if it can be a catalyst to that process. So, fellow scholars, let us not be too protective of our identities.

NOTES

1. The idea of race in terms of which the relevant identities are defined is itself in need of a careful, even cautious, scientific and philosophical analysis. Beyond the level of an intuitive referential use, it is well known that the concept of race (and its subcategories) may be heavily laden with theoretical problems. At the level of intuitive reference, it is certainly a fact that the word "race" and associated words, such as "white," "black," and so forth, can be used successfully for various purposes. For example, a group of thugs, seeking to harm any "blacks" within all the environs they can survey, will be able to identify their prospective victims, if within view, with only a small margin of error. Similarly, an association of antiracist activists calling upon "blacks" to come to a rally for organizing self-defense will in general attract the right crowd. Hence the *referents* of these words are easily identified. Yet the same is not true of their *signification*, even at this intuitive level of discourse. Defining the signification of words, such as "race," "white," "black," and so forth, with exactness and completeness is a task that will likely test the powers of even the most ingenious specialist in conceptual analysis. This, by the way, is a characteristic of the concepts—such as, to mention only a handful, truth, existence, reality, causality, freedom, virtue, goodness, mind, spirituality—that philosophers have toiled and continue to toil (inconclusively) to clarify and organize into a coherent world outlook.
2. See note 8.
3. In the literature of African religions there is a lot of talk of the "lesser deities" as objects of religious devotion. This is a misnomer aggravated by false analogies. In truth, the "deities" are believed to be beings and powers as creaturely as human beings. The interest in them is predicated on the idea that they have extrahuman abilities that can be exploited by those with the requisite knowledge. The indigenous attitude to them is so utilitarian and so conditional that to call it religious is to trivialize the concept of religion radically.
4. Occasionally, or perhaps more frequently, one hears dismissive remarks to the effect that some issue is merely linguistic. That may be a sure sign that the linguistic is being equated with the merely verbal. It is true that verbal issues are linguistic. But not all linguistic issues are verbal. Some are conceptual, and such issues may reflect highly subtle circumstances in the interactions of human beings with their environment or with their own kind. In fact, as suggested earlier, the development of linguistic skills is nothing short of the acquisition of mind, and the identity with which language endows the mind is something that it may carry till the end. The linguistic component of our cultural identity is thus of the most overriding importance.

5. The Akan philosopher and my former colleague, Kwame Gyekye, also has given a lucid articulation to the locative character of the Akan concept of existence in his *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 177–179. He does not, however, draw the implications I draw.
6. As it happens, it is not only from an Akan standpoint that such an animadversion might be entertained. The English-born philosopher Bertrand Russell, himself a master of English prose, was more unremitting. He declared, "Substance is a metaphysical mistake due to the *transference to the world-structure* of the structure of sentences composed of subject and predicate"; Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1946), 202. In his *An Outline of Philosophy,* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1927), 254. Russell adds, "A great book might be written showing the influence of syntax on philosophy; in such a book the author could trace the influence of the subject-predicate structure of sentences upon European thought, more particularly in the matter of 'substance.'" Ayer also, no mean adept at English prose, for his part maintains that those philosophers who advocate a doctrine of substance and attributes have been "duped" by grammar; see A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1946).
7. It is because of this self-reflexivity that Russell and Ayer, for example, were able, as we saw in note 6, to resist the ontological suggestiveness of their own language.
8. Hume, by the way, apart from his identity as a great eighteenth-century British philosopher, also wore the inglorious identity of an antiblack racist. It was actually an optional identity, for even in his own time and in his own country there were people, like James Beattie, an otherwise modest thinker, who rejected his racism. That Hume, in spite of his racism, seems to have had some profound insights into reality and human experience perhaps constitutes evidence that this is not the best of all possible worlds. His insights are presented in their most polished form in his *An Essay concerning Human Understanding,* in many editions, e.g., *David Hume, An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Eric Steinberg (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1977), sections IV, V, and IX. John Dewey, early in his *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1938), advances a theory of the biologic basis of logic that, I think, is cognate to Hume's theory, although he does not mention Hume in this connection. Dewey uses the word "habit" rather than "custom." "Habits," he says, "are the basis of organic learning" (p. 31). Hume had another kind of relation with another great mind. It is well known that on his own account, Kant was roused from his "dogmatic slumbers" by Hume's discussion of the foundations of all reasonings from experience. It is not equally well known that the same giant was much impressed with Hume's racism and was inspired to higher levels of racism. More evidence for the un-Leibnizian fears just expressed! On the racism of Hume and Kant, see Richard Popkin, "Hume's Racism," *Philosophical Forum* (Winter-Spring 1977–1978). See also, more broadly, Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, "The Color of Reason: The Idea of 'Reason' in Kant's Anthropology," and Tsenay Serequeberhan, "The Critique of Eurocentrism and the Practice of African Philosophy," both in *Postcolonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader,* ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997).
9. I had previously been unsure as to what strategy to adopt in response to anybody who denies the law of noncontradiction until I became aware of the marvelous advice of the logician Harry Gensler. He writes: "How do you respond to someone who denies the law of non-contradiction? Some logicians suggest hitting the person with a stick. A better idea . . . is to pretend to agree. Whenever you assert something also assert the opposite. . . . Soon your opponent will want to hit you with a stick!" Harry J. Gensler, *Formal Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 36; see also the back cover.

10. In illustration of independent considerations, one could, for example, quickly dispose of the objection to the locative conception of existence based on the ontological status of numbers. The argument, briefly, was that a number is not just a numeral but rather the entity to which the numeral refers. Such a referent, being nonphysical, must exist in some nonspatial realm. This argument confuses the signification of a term with its referent. When it is pointed out that a number is not just a numeral, one is thinking of the numeral as just a sign, a sheer physical fact. But in this capacity it cannot have a reference. A sign can only have a reference in virtue of its signification. Now, given a signification, it is always an intelligible question whether it has a referent, and on what evidence. The argument under discussion, however, seems, without further ado, to convert the signification of a numeral into a referent. Actually, there is a further conflation, for it seems to be also assumed that a referent is necessarily an entity. But in fact a referent may be a concept rather than an entity.
11. In view of my critical allusions to foreign studies of African thought, I ought to explain that there is no intention to suggest that a foreigner cannot enter into African thought and make insightful studies of it. In principle, a foreign student of African thought, if she masters the relevant African language and culture, can make as good a study of African thought as an African, if not better. It must be recognized, though, that this takes a combination of tenacity, freedom from preconceived ideas, and at least a basic respect for the African group in question. This remark about the possibility of foreign mastery of indigenous thought is a special case of the general fact noted earlier that whatever any human being can think any human being anywhere stands the chance of understanding, given requisite opportunities and facilities.

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